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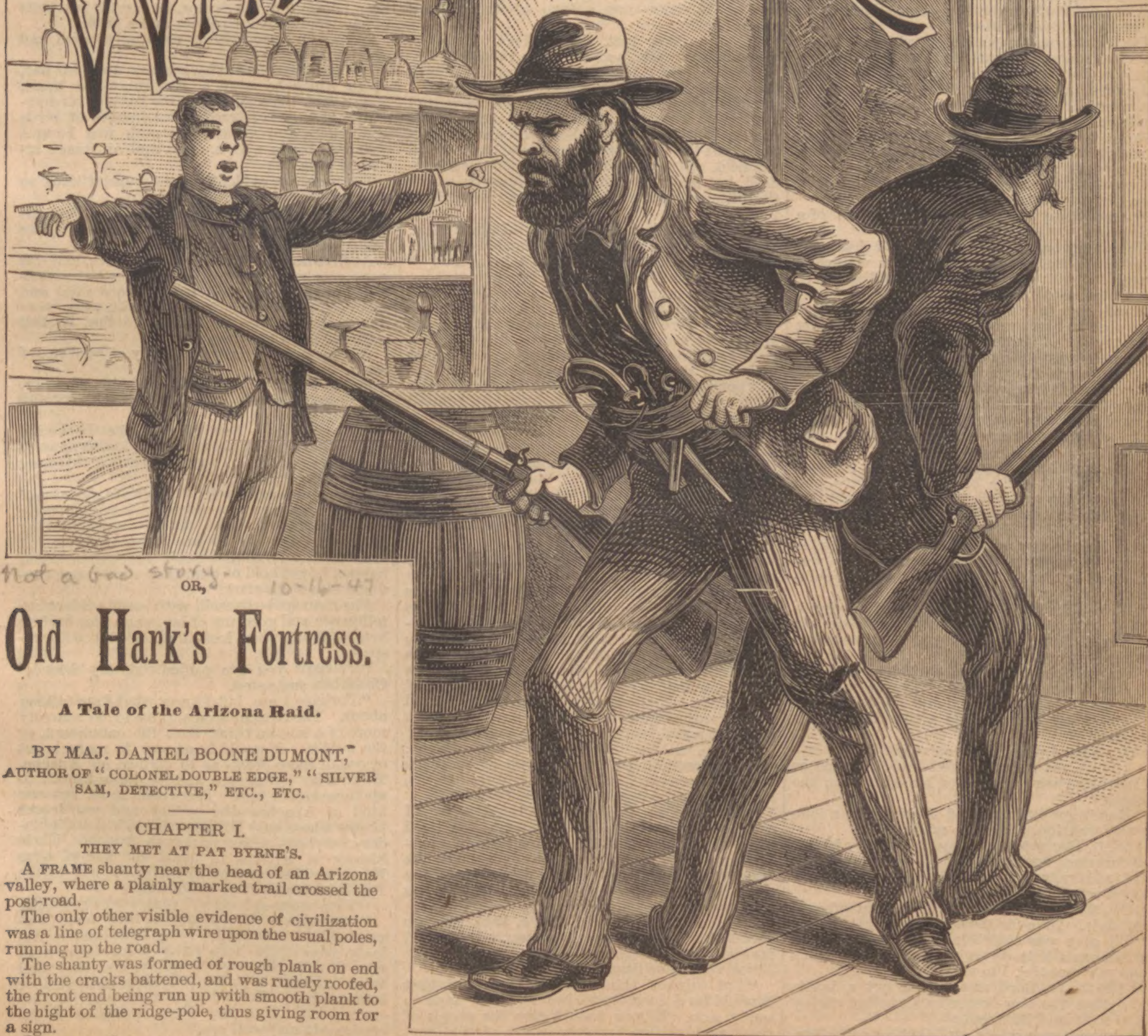
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THE WHITE CROOK



Not a bad story.
OR, 10-16-47

Old Hark's Fortress.

A Tale of the Arizona Raid.

BY MAJ. DANIEL BOONE DUMONT,
AUTHOR OF "COLONEL DOUBLE EDGE," "SILVER
SAM, DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THEY MET AT PAT BYRNE'S.

A FRAME shanty near the head of an Arizona valley, where a plainly marked trail crossed the post-road.

The only other visible evidence of civilization was a line of telegraph wire upon the usual poles, running up the road.

The shanty was formed of rough plank on end with the cracks battened, and was rudely roofed, the front end being run up with smooth plank to the height of the ridge-pole, thus giving room for a sign.

Of course there was a sign, which had been painted by some wandering artist in that line in

AT THE WORD THE TWO MEN STARTED OFF IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS, EACH WITH HIS RIFLE IN HIS HAND.

exchange for such entertainment as the shanty afforded.

It set forth the fact that "P. Byrne" was the proprietor, and the further fact that his business was to furnish "Refreshments."

Evidently the artist had not been disposed to do any more than he had bargained to do.

The refreshments alluded to were quite scanty in quantity and poor in quality, such as could never give Paddy Byrne's place the reputation of a first-class hotel.

There was a ramshackled shed with a little hay and corn under it, where horses might be fed, and in the shanty something in the shape of a meal could be dished up if the proprietor chanced to be sober enough—if not, the guest must forage about and do the best he could for himself.

The main reliance of the establishment was whisky, upon which Paddy Byrne could always fall back in any sort of an emergency.

To this style of refreshments the main room of the shanty was devoted, being provided with a rude plank counter, behind which was a shelf that held a few bottles and glasses.

Barrels and kegs were also visible, suggestive of a sufficient supply of spirituous refreshments.

It was nearly noon of an April day, and Paddy Byrne was standing behind his bar—a stout, red-faced man, coarse of features and rough in attire—with a short and black pipe in his mouth that seemed to be an inseparable portion of himself.

He had customers, too, to wait upon as well as to converse with.

Two of them were bright young men, who had met there for the first time, and seemed to be mutually pleased with each other.

A third was a lanky individual, with long hair and a cadaverous countenance, wearing a coat that was suggestive of ministerial proclivities.

He had ridden up on a horse that was nearly as bony as himself, and had been seated almost an hour against the wall on a block of wood that served for a chair, without calling for a drink or being invited to accept one.

Consequently he was not regarded with favor by the landlord, who emitted a contemptuous puff of smoke whenever his glance lighted on the lanky and silent sinner.

The fourth guest was scarcely visible.

He had come in silently and alone, had purchased and absorbed a glass of whisky in silence and alone, and had then retired to a dark corner, where he sat in silence on a block of wood nursing a rifle.

Those two silent ones made life in Paddy Byrne's hostelry rather monotonous, as the two bright young men had nobody but themselves to talk to, with the exception of an occasional word from the proprietor.

The monotony was broken by the arrival of a fifth guest.

He rode up on an Indian pony, and there was something about him which, to those who were acquainted with such matters, was indicative of association with Indians.

It was not in his attire, as he wore a blue jeans coat and trousers, with a blue flannel shirt and a brown felt hat, and was belted in civilized style with cartridges, a revolver and a knife, in addition to which ornament he carried a rifle.

It was not in his features or general appearance, as he was a middle-aged man of medium stature, and was evidently a white man, his dark complexion being nothing unusual in that region.

There must have been something in his gait and action that spoke of his antecedents, and more especially something in the quick and furtive glance he cast about him as he entered the shanty.

Doubtless he saw nothing suspicious there, as he stepped right up to the bar, where he was welcomed by Paddy Byrne as an old acquaintance.

"Why, Zeke Stebbins!" exclaimed the landlord. "It's ages sence I've seen yez. How air yez, anyhow, and whur hev yez been fur ivver so long?"

"I'm tol'able," answered Stebbins, in a low and secret tone that seemed to be peculiar to him, "and I've been around and about."

"And what wull yez be afther hevin' this mornin'?"

"Some good whisky, if you've got it."

"I hain't got it," answered Paddy Byrne as he leaned forward and rested his elbows on the counter.

"Hain't got it?" repeated Stebbins in a tone of consternation. "Got no whisky?"

"Wull, I've got what they call whisky in this God-forsaken country; but yez was askin' fur good whisky, and that's what I hain't seen a drap of sence I lift the ould sod."

"Oh, that way! I might have remembered your style. Give me the best you've got, then."

"I'll give yez somethin', Misther Stebbins, that'll burn a hole down yer gullet, and that's what ye'r wantin', I'm thinkin'."

While the landlord was setting out a bottle and a glass, the new-comer took another survey of the room and its inmates.

His glance was quick and furtive as before, but seemed to be a little more confident, this

time scrutinizing everything and everybody more carefully.

Again he seemed satisfied that there was nothing that ought to excite his suspicions, and he turned to the two young men who were standing near the bar, and invited them to join him.

One of them, to judge from his look of disgust, seemed to be inclined to refuse the invitation, but the other nudged him, and both accepted.

Zeke Stebbins seemed to overlook the man in the dark corner, and turned to him who was seated against the wall.

"Take a drink, stranger?" he inquired.

The lanky man's way of responding to the invitation was peculiar—at least peculiar in that region.

"Well, I don't know," he slowly replied, as he straightened himself up. "I ain't used to drinkin' spirituous liquor"—here he rose to his feet—"but in this country it may be a dooty a man owes to himself"—here he shuffled toward the bar—"to take, as St. Paul says, a little wine for the stomach's sake"—here he reached the counter—"and I guess I may as well try a leetle of that whisky."

Zeke Stebbins had already forgotten him, and was absorbing his p'ison, nodding to the two young fellows, when the lanky man helped himself to a glass full of the fiery fluid, and drank it slowly and deliberately, as if he liked it.

"I'm glad yez have turned up at last, Zeke," said Paddy Byrnes, "bekase I reckon yez kin give us the news we are achin' fur in these parts."

"What news?" inquired Stebbins.

"'Bout the 'Pache uprisin'."

"I don't know nothin' about any uprisin'. Don't know nothin' about the 'Paches."

"Yez don't? Well, it's quare if yez don't. Don't trade with them no more? Don't sell 'em no more whisky?"

"I've gone to minin' and spekilatin'."

"Yez have? That's quare ag'in. Don't see how yez c'd cut loose from 'em. A squaw man, too."

"Who says I'm a squaw man? That's jest what I ain't. I married a woman who had been brought up among the 'Paches, but she was a Mexican—not a drap of Injun blood about her!"

"Glad to hear that. Well, Zeke, I reckon yez made yer pile, and ought to be satisfied."

"Never you mind about my pile. What's that news about the 'Paches?"

"That they've bruk out, that's the news, and bad news it is, too. The way we git it about here is that five hundred or a thousand bucks have quit the San Carlos corral and gone off on the wild. I reckon that means fifty or a hundred, but that's enough, wid the loose ones over the hills, as you ought to know, Zeke Stebbins."

"I dunno as I ought to know. I dunno, too, as the 'Paches are so mighty much to blame. Jest look at the case as it is. A lot of men—"

"Murderers!" suggested Pat Byrne.

"They've murdered and been murdered, and they allus got the wu'st of it. A lot of men, I says, who have been used to huntin' and roamin' about the kentry jest as they pleased, 'cause they allus lived thar and owned it, are hauled down and shet up in a corral, with nothin' to eat but measly bacon, starved beef, and mag-gotty flour, while the white folks are runnin' over ther lands and gobblin' 'em up, and they are expected to stay thar and keep quiet. Ain't it too much to look fur? White men couldn't do it, much less the 'Paches, who have never been trained down to anythin' o' the sort. No, they ain't so mighty much to blame."

"Our friend is right," interposed the lanky man, whose tongue had been oiled by the whisky he drank at Zeke Stebbins's expense, and who seemed to be anxious to make amends for his recent silence.

"He is quite right, and I honor his boldness and sincerity. The truth should be told in the high places of the land, and the greed and rapacity and cruelty of the white settlers should be exposed. The story of our dealings with the unfortunate red-men is the darkest chapter in American history. They have been robbed of their lands, swindled, impoverished, slaughtered by starvation and the bullet, until hardly a remnant remains of the once free and noble—"

"Hullo, mister!" broke in Paddy Byrne, rudely interrupting what was evidently a speech that had been often rehearsed. "Who air yez, anyhow, and whar did yez come from?"

"My name, sir, is Ephraim Cronkhite, and I am a minister of the Gospill from the good State of Michigan. I have come here on a missionary errand, to improve the condition of the poor red-men, and to call the attention of the authorities at Washington to the impositions that are practiced upon them."

"Is Michigan a good State, thin, Misther Crankeye?" inquired the Irishman, as he leaned forward on his counter.

"A very good State, sir, is Michigan."

"I'm thinkin', thin, Misther Crankeye, that it w'd be a good State fur to move back to purty soon. If you should give the people of this poor, dried-up Territory much of that sort of talk yez started in at jist now, they might be

quick to let yez know that they'd be more'n willin' to try to git along widout yez."

"I shall not return to Michigan," sternly replied the orator. "I shall remain here and devote myself to the labor of converting the unfortunate Apaches and bringing them under the influences of Christianity and civilization."

"You've got a big contract on your hands, stranger."

This remark was made in a deep voice and impressive tones, that caused all to turn and look at the speaker.

He was the man who had been seated in the dark corner, and who had approached the group so silently that his presence had not been perceived.

CHAPTER II.

HARK, THE HATER.

It was no wonder that all the other guests in Paddy Byrne's hostelry turned to look at the man who had come up out of the dark corner, as he was a remarkable man.

His voice attracted their attention, and his appearance held it.

If it had not been for his unmistakably Caucasian features he might have been taken for an Indian, as his skin was deeply bronzed, and his raven-black hair was worn long and straight, and his dark eyes had the piercing but at the same time restless look peculiar to the untamed aborigines.

He wore, however, a full and heavy beard, which was probably never trimmed except with the scissors, and in both beard and hair there were many threads of silver.

When he sat there in the corner he might have been supposed to be an insignificant person; but when he had raised himself to his full height, he was seen to be a man of commanding presence.

There could be no question of his thews and sinews, and it was evident that there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his bones, though his tunic-coat of worn and dirty deer-skin did not show off his figure to advantage, nor did the flannel strips or "savers" that were wrapped about his legs tend to improve his appearance.

Besides the fine Winchester rifle which he had been hugging in the corner, he carried two belts of cartridges, two revolvers and a knife.

In fact he looked like a walking arsenal and ammunition-chest.

His face was shaded by a heavy gray felt hat, about which he wore a Mexican silver band, with a metal image, and on the front of his deer-skin coat were scattered metal images of birds and beasts, and around his neck was hung a string of beads with a cross and an image attached to it.

The man was evidently very superstitious in religion or otherwise.

Another strange thing about him was the complete change in his manner and tone after he had joined the group at the bar.

At first he was fiery and impulsive, and his voice was harsh and almost savage; but directly his countenance and action were mild and subdued, and when he next spoke his tones were soft and persuasive, as if he feared that he had intruded upon the company.

He was instantly recognized by at least two of them.

Paddy Byrne's face lighted up with pleasure, and Zeke Stebbins's dark skin flushed at first and then turned ashen pale.

"Hyer's Hark Sarpy," said the Irishman. "I'd nigh about forgot him. He knows more of the 'Paches and the'r ways than any o' this gang 'less it's Zeke Stebbins."

"The gentleman from Michigan is mistaken," said the man who was called Hark Sarpy. "He means well, let us hope, but he knows nothing about the Apaches or any other Indians. If some of those free and noble aborigines should happen to get hold of him, they would soon convince him of his error."

The man spoke so well, with such evident intelligence and good use of language that the two bright young men looked upon him with respect.

"Perhaps you are prejudiced, my friend," Cronkhite suggested.

"Perhaps I am, but I know what I am talking about. The Apache seems to me to be scarcely more of a human being than the catamount or the wolf is. It would be as easy to make a pet of one of those beasts as to civilize an Apache. He is wild by nature, and to tame him is to make an end of him. There used to be but one kind of Apaches—the savage and murderous brutes whose only business was to kill and plunder everybody who was not an Apache. Their history is written in blood and fire all over Northern Mexico, from the Rio Grande to the Pacific, from El Paso to Durango."

"They were oppressed," suggested Cronkhite.

"Oppressed? Yes, I suppose they were. Oppressed by a craving for blood and plunder. Nobody who could keep away from them went near them in their own country, and they had to go hundreds of miles from home to hunt their human prey. They always went, and they always got it. Yes, they were oppressed as the catamount and wolf are."

"But they are different now," said the mis-

sionary. "Settlement and civilization have brought changes."

"That is true. The white men of the North have hemmed in the Apache, and have taught him that killing is a game at which two can play. It is not now the weak and cowardly Mexican with whom he has to deal, and he is liable to be caught and corraled when he gets his Injun up. There are now two kinds of Apaches. One is the tame kind, such as are seen loafing about the settlements, greasy, filthy and in every way worthless, with no ambition but to steal, drink whisky and pick the parasites from their nasty bodies."

"They have been ruined by rum," observed the missionary.

"Not by rum exactly," answered Hark Sarpy. "It is whisky that has done the work. That is the great and only civilizer, and men like Zeke Stebbins have done better than they meant to do. Whisky civilizes the Apache when nothing else will, and when he is well civilized he goes under the ground. Does it ruin him? Well, he is ruined for the wolf and catamount business."

"Your sentiments are atrocious," exclaimed Cronkhite.

"Say, Misther Crankeye," interposed the man behind the bar, "air yez wan av thim Quakers that was sint out to play the peace policy game wid the Injuns?"

"A Quaker?" angrily replied the missionary. "No, indeed! My religion is touched with no such heresy. I despise the Quakers!"

"Well, Misther Crankeye, thar's wuss folks than the Quakers. They don't steal, annyhow, and some others do."

"My mission, sir, is to touch the better part of those free and noble aborigines who have not been ruined by rum."

"That is the other kind of Apaches that I spoke of," resumed Hark Sarpy. "They have not been civilized out of the wolf and catamount condition. Some of them allow themselves to be corraled on Government reservations, where they eat the food the white men give them, until they are ready to strike the white men to pay for it. The others are still wild in the hills, thinking of nothing but murder and plunder, and preparing to creep up and spring upon their victims as the catamount does."

"You are surely prejudiced against those poor people," protested Cronkhite.

"Prejudiced? Well, I ought to be! I have good cause to be prejudiced. Have you a family, stranger?"

"I have a wife and children in Michigan."

"Keep them there. Don't bring them here. I had a wife and three children. I have now one child. Where are the others? Ask the Apaches! I had made a pleasant home for them in the Territory. One day I went hunting, and when I got back my home was in ashes. My wife's body was in the ashes—what was left of it. God only knows what she had suffered before the Angel of Death came to relieve her. At the foot of a tree against which its brains had been dashed out, was her innocent babe, horribly mutilated. My oldest daughter had happened to be in the woods, and thus escaped with her life. My other bright-eyed darling, where is she? Ever since I have sought her, but have not found her."

Hark Sarpy bowed his head, and his dark face grew darker, but there were no tears in his eyes. The time for tears had long since passed.

"That is really very sad, Mr. Sarpy," said the missionary, "and I am truly sorry for you. I suppose your story ought to be a warning to me, but I must do my duty as it is pointed out to me. I would be glad to have your good wishes."

"I wish you so well," answered Hark, "that I hope you may never have a chance of doing what you speak of doing. If you should try to touch one of those wild Apaches in what you call his better part, it would be the last thing you would be likely to touch on this earth."

"I must hope that you will be mistaken. I perceive that you hate those people."

"Hate them? Hate is a weak word, but I suppose it will have to do. I am Hark the Hater, I am!"

CHAPTER III.

A QUEER DUEL.

WHEN Hark Sarpy had said his say the missionary from Michigan quieted down and resumed his seat against the wall.

There he fell into a brown study, apparently trying to digest the hard facts that had been given him.

Zeke Stebbins, who had been restless and uneasy during the foregoing conversation, brightened up when it was ended, and endeavored to infuse a livelier tone into the proceedings.

"Come, now," said he; "we don't need to bother about the 'Paches. Let's p'ison ourselves with some of Pat Byrne's tanglefoot. What'll ye have, young gentlemen? Mr. Crankeye, will you take another drop o' suthin' fur the stum-mick's sake?"

The man from Michigan did not seem to heed the invitation.

"Pears like he's gone under a cloud," muttered Stebbins. "Come, Mr. Sarpy, what'll you take to drink?"

"Nothing with you," was the calm but decided answer.

"What's that? Won't drink with me? What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that I would never drink with you or with any person of your stripe, and no more would any white man who knows you as I do."

Zeke Stebbins flared up hotly, as there could scarcely be a greater insult at that time and place than the words to which he had just been forced to listen.

"You've got to take that back!" he roared.

"What do you know ag'inst me? You war accusin' me jest now of p'isonin' the red-skins."

"Oh, that's nothing," rejoined Sarpy. "I make no doubt that you have killed more of them than I have, though I can't give you credit for meaning it. But, that is not worth speaking of. The worst fact about you, Zeke Stebbins, is that you have been for years and are yet a spy of the Apaches, and the chances are that you are here now for the purpose of putting them on the track of murder and plunder."

"It's a lie!" shouted Stebbins, as he grabbed his rifle.

Hark Sarpy did not raise his Winchester; but his right hand dropped on the butt of a revolver in his belt, and there was a wicked gleam in his eyes, as if he meant to use it.

Before a weapon could be used the two young men stepped between the foes with the intention of keeping them apart.

The missionary from Michigan jumped up and ran toward them with his long arms outstretched.

"Do no murder!" he cried. "In the name of the God of Peace, let us have peace!"

His style of interposition was so ludicrous that it caused a diversion, but it was Paddy Byrne who settled the matter after a fashion of his own.

He jumped over the counter and laid a hand upon the shoulder of each of the combatants.

"Div yez want to fight?" said he, his Irish coming out strong in his excitement. "Thin yez shall fight; but it'll have to be done to suit me, as this is me own house, or Oi'll take a hand in, meself. I'll give yez a fair fight if yez moind me. Will yez do that now?"

"Give me a fair chance at him—that's all I ask," answered Zeke Stebbins.

Hark Sarpy merely smiled and nodded.

"Listen to me, thin. Thar's a dure at the front, and thar's a dure at the back. I put yez here, back to back, each wid his rifle in his hand. At the word 'Go!' yez'll start fur wan dure and the ither, and whin yez git outside the circus'll begin. Div yez understand?"

They "understood," and were placed back to back.

"Air yez ready, thin?" called out Pat.

They were ready.

"Then go, ye divils!"

At the word the two men started off in opposite directions, each with his rifle in his hand, Sarpy heading for the front door, and Stebbins for the back door.

Mr. Cronkhite dropped upon his knees, uttering incoherent exclamations that might be intended for prayer.

Paddy Byrne and the two young men followed Hark Sarpy.

He got out at the front door with amazing swiftness, cocked his rifle as he passed around the corner of the shanty, and looked for his foe.

He saw him, but not as he might have expected to see him.

The Indian-trader's horse had been tethered at the back door, and Stebbins had mounted him instantly, and was then galloping down the valley.

The remaining duelist fired a shot in the air and grounded his rifle.

The shot hastened the flight of the fugitive, and Paddy Byrne and the two young men burst into roars of laughter.

"I ax yer pardon, Misther Sarpy," said the Irishman, "but I knew it w'd turn out that way. I knew whar his hoss wur, and that he'd be bound to shkip out. I didn't want any blood-sheddin' in my place, ye see."

"It is just as well," answered Hark. "I was not anxious to kill the wretch. He deserves killing, but his time has not come yet."

"Will yez step in, thin, and take a drink wid me, be token av forgiveness?"

This invitation was accepted, and the four men went into the shanty, where the missionary from Michigan declared that the peaceful issue of the difficulty was in direct answer to his prayers.

He was so elated by this idea that he was willing to drink at the expense of the proprietor, and was not at all inclined to stint himself in his allowance of tanglefoot.

When they had absorbed their poison, Hark Sarpy seemed to pay more attention than previously to the two young men, though he had by no means overlooked them.

They were worth looking at, and the wonder was how they happened to be there.

One was a tall and fine-looking young man, well up in his twenties, dressed in a complete

suit of brown corduroy, the coat of which was plentifully supplied with pockets.

His trousers were partly covered by high boots, and a broad felt hat covered his brown hair and shaded his brown eyes.

His tanned face was shaven, with the exception of a mustache, and his build and action spoke of health and vigor and agility.

The other was younger and shorter than he, and generally smaller, and was a light blonde, with an unshaven down on his face, and an expression of good humor and alertness.

He was dressed in a suit of jeans that was nearly as tough and durable as the other's corduroy, with the inevitable high boots and felt hat.

Neither had the appearance of being armed, yet there was at least a belt of cartridges, with the necessary revolver under the butternut coat of each.

Hark Sarpy turned to the taller and elder of the two.

"Where have I seen you before?" he asked.

"It seems to me that I ought to know you, but I can't call your name."

"My name is Mark Stepney," answered the young man.

"Thank you; but the name tells me nothing. Where have I seen you?"

"If you have happened to strike Colonel Powell's surveying party, it is likely that you ran across me there."

"You were with him? Then you will do to tie to. I suppose that is your bay horse outside, and that is your rifle in the corner. Good! Have you quit the party?"

"We are laid off for a while, and I am on my way to San Carlos. I stopped in here and met my friend Mr.—this is Jack Bunn, Mr. Sarpy."

"Andrew Jackson Bunn, at your service," announced the younger man with a smile.

"And what may you be doing here, Mr. Bunn?" inquired Hark.

"Doing? Why, I belong here. I am a telegraph operator."

"That is a risky business in these parts."

"I am afraid it is, and I am afraid that my station, about two miles from here, on the crest of the ridge yonder, is a pretty risky sort of a place. But I've got three of the boys there just now, who quit their stations on account of the Indian scare, and they all happened to drop in on me."

"Well, Mr. Bunn, you may be safe there for a day or two, perhaps three days, as there are no wild Apaches in these parts yet, but it won't do to stay there long. Mr. Stepney, are you going on to San Carlos?"

"Not just now. I am going to hive with Jack Bunn and his friends for a little while."

"I may see you shortly, then. This mistaken man from Michigan had better get in to San Carlos as soon as possible and save that attractive scalp of his. Pat Byrne will give him the direction. Are you going to stick it out, Pat?"

"Oi don't belave Oi wull, srr. Oi'm goin' to loight out o' this as soon as Oi kin git a team to kerry me shtuff."

"That is right. I am afraid that there is no foolishness about this scare."

"Are you going down to San Carlos, Mr. Sarpy?" inquired Mark Stepney.

"I? No, indeed! I have work to do that will keep me away from all settlements for a while. Good-by, and good-luck to you all!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE LONE TELEGRAPH STATION.

WHEN Hark Sarpy had gone away the two young men mounted their horses and rode up the valley, leaving Ephraim Cronkhite with the Irishman.

"That is a strange man who has just left us," said Stepney.

"Yes, and a tough one," assented Jack Bunn.

"No doubt he has good cause to be tough; but his toughness don't prevent him from being a gentleman. I almost wish he had killed that sneak who wanted to fight him and ran away. You may be sure that the fellow is just what Sarpy declared him to be, a friend of the Apaches and a spy."

"I must admit that his looks were not in his favor, and I judge him to be the sort that will bear watching. What is the matter, Mark? Has your horse dropped a shoe?"

"This is a rough trail. Where is your den?"

"Not much further. The boys will be glad to see us, I guess, as they hated to have me go away this morning. The fact is that they are pretty badly scared, and no wonder, as there are so many reports flying about. I don't believe half of them, myself, and have got so used to false alarms that they don't worry me much. The new hands, though, make no bones of quitting their stations and running in for safety when a scare is started near them."

"That must break up the service pretty badly," suggested Stepney.

"So it does; but that don't matter much, as there is little to do in these out stations at any time. The through line generally works well enough, and the boys go back when the scare is over."

"Don't the hostiles interfere with the wires or the poles?"

"Never, as far as I know. I believe they are a bit superstitious about them. There's my shanty, and there are the boys on the keen watch for me!"

The valley had narrowed to a glen which had the appearance of being the bed of an occasional mountain torrent; and the ascent was so steep and rugged that the two friends were glad when they reached the crest.

There was a small and rude frame shanty, into which a wire led from an adjoining pole, and in front of the door were three young men, somewhat similar in appearance to Jack Bunn, who joyfully greeted him and congratulated him on his safe return.

He introduced them to his companion as Jim Beebe, Steve Trenholm and Joe Leavenworth, and all were glad enough to make the acquaintance of the new arrival.

"In union there is strength," observed Trenholm, "and we five ought to be able to make a decent sort of a fight if it should be forced on us."

After the horses were cared for all went into the shanty.

It contained but one room, which was the cooking and sleeping and working room of the sole proprietor.

At one end was a fire-place, and at the other end a couch of blankets laid upon grama grass. The remaining furniture consisted of a rude table and seats and a telegraph instrument with its apparatus.

The rude walls were brightened by a number of cuts from illustrated papers and colored cards that were pasted and nailed here and there.

The shanty was hardly more than large enough for one person to inhabit comfortably, and when the five young men had squeezed in it was crowded.

"Well, boys," said Jack Bunn, "I have not only brought myself and a friend, but something in the way of consolation that may please you."

Opening his coat he brought out two flasks of "mountain dew" which he had procured at Pat Byrne's, and upon these his friends seized eagerly.

"Take it easy, boys," was Jack's caution. "You had better touch that pizen very lightly, for two good and sufficient reasons. Firstly, because it is all we are likely to get until we strike the settlements, and secondly, because we had better keep our heads clear, as we may need our wits to save our scalps before we are out of this scrape."

His advice was heeded by the others, and the liquor was sampled moderately and filed away for future reference.

"Any news since I've been away?" inquired Jack Bunn.

"We have heard from headquarters often enough," answered Beebe. "They kept wanting to know if you were here and if there was any Apache news. I answered for them that you were on deck and that no hostiles had shown up yet."

"I called up Pivot Rock," remarked Leavenworth. "Charley said that the reds were reported to be all around there and that he was going to light out. Bet it's a lie."

"What is a lie?" inquired Jack. "The report or the light out? Maybe the report was as true as those that sent you fellows kiting away from your stations. As for the lighting out, you may trust Charley to do that. You know how it is, yourselves. For my part, I mean to light out pretty soon, too, as my scalp is precious, and I have heard some news this morning that I can depend on."

A burning anxiety to hear this news was instantly developed, and Jack gave an account of his meeting with Hark Sarpy at Pat Byrne's and what he had heard there.

The information caused an uneasy feeling in the party, and it was clearly the opinion of the majority that the lighting out ought not to be long delayed.

Trenholm and Leavenworth volunteered to go out on the ridge and act as sentries, thus relieving the pressure in the shanty, while Jack Bunn and Beebe cooked a plentiful but not inviting meal for the crowd.

When darkness came on it was not considered worth while to post sentries outside, as they would not be likely to see anything with the best use they could make of their eyes, and the five young men made themselves as comfortable as they could in the one room of the shanty.

Cards were produced, and the two flasks were brought out, and the spirits of the party rose as they drew up around the rude table and devoted themselves to such festivity as the time and place afforded.

The fact that there were five of them, well supplied with weapons, gave them a feeling of security that asserted itself more strongly as the stuff in the flasks was lowered.

"In union there is strength," said Trenholm again. "If any of those sneaking catamounts should happen around here to-night, we ought to be able to give them a pretty warm reception."

"Bother the red-skins," exclaimed Beebe. "I don't believe they are near as tough as they are talked up to be, and I sha'n't worry about them any more."

"That's the way I feel," broke in Leavenworth. "We are safe enough as long as the liquor lasts, anyhow."

"All the same," suggested Mark Stepney, "it will be well to have our guns within reach and our pistols handy. What do you say, Mr. Bunn?"

"I ain't saying much," answered Jack; "but I try to keep my eyes and ears open."

The game was continued and ended, and then the caution that had been maintained concerning the tanglefoot ceased to be observed.

The contents of the flasks rapidly decreased, and the young men became jolly and careless.

Joe Leavenworth, who was proud of himself as a spouter, jumped upon his seat and began to recite the speech of the Banished Duke in "As You Like It."

"Now, my co-mates and comrades in exile,

Hath not old custom made this life more sweet Than that of painted pomp?"

"Oh, get out!" roared Jack Bunn. "Nothing painted here but your nose, and you mustn't expect us to stand that rant. I'd rather the Apaches—"

He stopped suddenly, and stared at the door, which was just then pushed open.

There had not been the slightest sound of an approaching footfall; but two men were there who stalked in unceremoniously.

They were formidable persons to look at, being nothing less than stalwart Apaches, two big bucks, naked to the waist, and painted in the fiercest style of aboriginal art, but with nether garments that "gave them away" to those who were versed in such matters.

One wore a pair of ragged trousers, and the other a pair of overalls.

Joe Leavenworth had dropped instantly from his stand, and Beebe and Trenholm seemed to be endeavoring to shrink out of sight.

Mark Stepney had drawn and cocked a revolver as quick as a flash; but Jack Bunn touched him on the arm:

"I don't think we will need to fight with these fellows," said the telegraph man. "Wait a minute."

The savages stood in the doorway, muttering guttural ejaculations.

Jack Bunn opened a box in a corner of the room, and took out two big plugs of tobacco, which he handed to them.

They accepted the gifts with a little more guttural talk, and left the shanty, after casting longing glances at the bottles on the table.

"We had better step out a minute, Mark," said Jack Bunn, "and make sure that they don't steal any of our horses."

CHAPTER V.

PADDY BYRNE'S FATE.

WHEN Hark Sarpy and the two young men had left the hostelry, the only persons remaining there were Paddy Byrne and the missionary from Michigan, and the latter personage did not seem to be in any hurry to get away.

The warning that he had received seemed to have no effect upon him, and perhaps he was loth to leave the whisky, by a portion of which his brain had been more or less touched.

Paddy Byrne went to the back door and looked down the valley, as if to catch a sight of the still retreating form of Zeke Stebbins.

Of course he saw nothing of the kind, and he came back to the bar, his sides shaking with laughter.

"That's the last o' Zeke Stebbins!" exclaimed the amused Irishman. "He won't come back here no more. He don't want any Hark Sarpy in his'n, and he'll steer clear o' that ould mon if there's room enough betwixt this an' Mexico. Be jabers, it was as gud as a play to see him scamperin' off as if the devil had bit him."

"It was well for him to escape the shedding of blood," observed Cronkhite.

"Moighty little danger av any blood-sheddin' whin there was a chance fur him to git away, Misther Crankeye."

"Yet there promised to be a serious and bloody contest, and it was owing to my prayers that there came a peaceful ending."

"Yer pra'rs, is it? Was it yer pra'rs that give Zeke Stebbins that purty scare? Was it yer pra'rs that tuck the sand out av his craw an' filled it up wid fear? It didn't need no pra'rs to do that, Misther Crankeye. The fear was already there, and it's no wonder that he was afeard to face Old Hark."

"Why should a good man fear?"

"Well, I dunno as a gud man sh'ud fear annythin' but Satan; but that hain't got nothin' to do wid Zeke Stebbins. A squaw man can't be a gud man; else why w'ud he l'ave his own people an' take up wid the p'ison red-skins? If there was iver anythin' gud or white or brave or day-cint in him, that would drain it out."

"Perhaps he has the good of their souls at heart."

"Is it 'atin' their bodies up wid whisky that's goin' to benefit their sowl's? No; it's the benefit av his pocket that he's afther. The honest truth

is, Misther Crankeye, that it was meself who purvented the sheddin' av blood."

"How was that, Mr. Byrne?"

"And can't yez see it widout tellin'? Didn't yez take the laste bit av a tumble to the beautiful game I was playin'? Didn't yez know that I was playin' the keards so's to git the two av thim wider apart?"

"It seemed to me that you were trying to get them together, so that they could have a good chance to kill each other."

"Bless yer innocent sowl! It's the full bloom-in' flowers av ignorance yez are. Whin I sint wan av them out at the back dure an' t'other out at the front dure, do yez fancy fur a minnit that I didn't know what I was doin'? Trust Paddy Byrne fur the skill to start a fight or stop it. I knew well enough that Zeke Stebbins had his horse hitched there by the back dure, and that as soon as he got clear av the house he'd jump up an' scamper away fur dear life. And it's well for him that he did, bad 'cess to him! or Hark Sarpy w'ud ha' put a hole through the place where his heart ought to be quicker'n than you c'ud ax me to take a drink."

"Is Hark Sarpy such a terrible man?" inquired Cronkhite, without noticing the hint conveyed in the Irishman's last remark.

"Well, he's a howly terror to thim as needs to be terrified, an' no mistake about that. I'll jest tell ye a short bit av a story about him, Misther Crankeye."

"He happened to be in here wan day a little while afther I'd opened this house—more be token there was purty gud business fur me then, along of a mine that had been opened nigh about, but it petered out, bad 'cess to it, an' left me high an' dry."

"Thar was a big crowd here that day, and a purty tough lot it was, too, and Misther Sarpy was sittin' in the corner over there, jest as yez saw him this mornin', takin' no notice av what was goin' on, an' nobody takin' notice of him."

"A crippled boy kim in, an' I reckon he had somehow got some of the mine men down on him."

"Anyhow, they was jest full enough av the stuff they call whisky about here to be mean and ugly, and they set in to tease and worry the poor boy."

"He stood it well enough till they began hurtin' him, and then they hurted him right bad, I kin tell yez, pinchin' an' kickin' an' abusin' him, jist fur the fun av hearin' him howl."

"I tried to put in a word fur the boy, but I was no more 'count than a straw in a whirl wind."

"Afther a while two av thim started to lift him up by the ears, while the others jest roared wid laughter at his screamin' and kickin', as if they was a lot of haythen savages."

"Then it was that old Hark jumped in, or walked in, quiet an' easy-like, as yez saw him do a bit ago."

"He snatched the boy away from thim, and cussed them black an' blue fur a set of cowardly brutes, an' that's what they was, to treat a poor cripple so."

"They wasn't goin' to stand that, as he was only wan man ag'inst a crowd, and they talked back to him sharp enough, and started for the boy."

"Hark Sarpy knocked down a couple av thim as neat as you'd want to see, and whin the crowd made a rush at him it w'ud ha' done yer innocent sowl good to see the man!"

"He backed the boy into a corner and pulled a couple of revolvers and jest dared the hull b'ilin' av them to come on."

"They stopped to think about it, and that settled the question."

"Whin they looked into Old Hark's eyes, and saw fight jumpin' out at every sparkle, and reckoned up the kind o' man that was talkin' to 'em, they sort o' set it down that the fun wasn't w'uth fightin' fur, an' that 'twas best not to bother about the boy any more."

"So Hark led the cripple out, and took him safe to where he belonged, and I didn't see him ag'in fur a long time."

"I am afraid that he is a violent and bloody-minded man," observed Mr. Cronkhite. "Yet the protection of the crippled boy was a good deed, and he should have credit for that."

"I'd be glad to bu'st in the skull of the man who'd say it wasn't a good thing. It was fine, the way he knocked down them two toughs. He did it quicker'n yez c'ud ask me to take a drink."

Again Ephraim Cronkhite proved himself impervious to all such insinuations, and Paddy Byrne became quite disgusted with his unprofitable guest.

"I'm thinkin' ye'd better be startin' on," said the Irishman.

"It is early yet," suggested Cronkhite.

"Not a bit too airly fur that. Remimber the warnin' Misther Sarpy gave yez. Better hurry up an' git down to San Carlos, if yez don't want to git picked up by the 'Paches."

"Why should I fear that? I have come here in the interest of the poor Indians, my friend, and am seeking them in order that I may do them good."

"You'll be sure to do that, Misther Crankeye, if they ever come across yez. Nothin' 'ud do thim poor Injuns more gud than to take yer scalp, afther roastin' yez over a slow fire an' playin' wid yez all the divilish tricks they know of. Yes, you'd do 'em a heap o' gud."

"You are prejudiced, my friend, against the poor aborigines."

"'Riginys or no 'riginys, thim's the solid facts, and you'll have to be gittin' out av this shanty annyhow, Misther Crankeye, beca'se I'm goin' to be shettin' it up right soon now, and try to find some way to git mesilf an' me belongin's to a safe place."

"If that is the case, my friend, I will not stand in your way a moment. Be so kind as to point out to me the direction of San Carlos, and I will proceed to journey thither."

The Irishman led the man from Michigan to the back door of the shanty, and pointed out the road that led down the valley.

"It's the road that brought yez here," said he, "and anny fool ought to have sense enough to folley it back. Jist stick to that road, Misther Crankeye, and it'll fetch yez to San Carlos, if yez don't bring up in heaven afore yez git to the fut av the valley."

"I thank you, my friend, for your kindness and for your hospitality. Farewell, and peace be with you!"

"And good riddance to yez, fur a stingy an' cranksided cuss that's got a name to fit yer nater!" muttered the Irishman, as the stranger from Michigan mounted his horse and rode away.

Paddy Byrne looked after him for a while as he jolted off on his bony steed, and then returned into the shanty.

"May the divil fly away wid me," said he, "if I know what to make of that mon, annyhow. He's ayther wan av the biggest frauds or wan of the biggest fools I ever met, and it ain't always aisy in this worruld to tell the frauds from the fools. Well, if he's a fraud, he'll be likely to git found out afore long, and if he's a fool, may the Lord help him in this country!"

Paddy Byrne had meant what he said when he declared his purpose of shutting up the shanty and seeking a safe place; but he had various odds and ends of matters to attend to before he could stir out.

He wanted to carry his property away with him, or as much of it as possible, and to that end it was necessary to pack up some bottles and other articles of glassware that would be liable to get broken.

His first move was to take all the money in the place—no large amount—and stuff it into a belt which he carried on his person.

Then he proceeded to pack in a box a few articles that he considered worth the time and trouble that it would take to pack them.

While he was thus employed, he heard the trampling of a horse near by.

He listened anxiously, but was reassured when he perceived that it was only one horse, and resumed his occupation.

The horse stopped at the shanty, and directly a man stepped inside.

Paddy Byrne looked up and recognized the new-comer as Zeke Stebbins, the squaw man who had lately left that locality in such an ignominious manner.

Though Stebbins was an unwelcome visitor, the Irishman could not afford to have any enemies on his hands just then, and he welcomed him quite cordially.

"Walk right in, Mr. Stebbins. There's nobody here now to pick a quarrel wid yez, and I'm glad to see yez come back safe an' sound."

"Did you think I'd run away?" growled the other.

"Well, sir, I thought yez had sort o' taken yourself out o' the way of danger, and I honored yez fur that same, as it was jist what I wanted yez to do."

"I want you to understand, Mr. Paddy from Cork, that if I did git out o' the way, I ain't afeard o' Hark Sarpy, and never was!"

"Divil a bit was I hintin' at a scare, and I thank yez kindly fur makin' no bloodshed about my place. What will yez take to drink, Misther Stebbins?"

"Whisky, and the best you've got. What are you doin' here, Pat?"

"Jist packin' up a few things, sir, bekase I'm goin' to be took wid a 'pavin' right shortly."

"Afeard o' the 'Paches?" inquired Stebbins, as he helped himself freely to the liquor.

"Well, I dunno. There's no business doin', and it's tired av the place I am, sir. Howly mither av Moses, what's those?"

Well might the Irishman stop and stare, as his ruddy face turned ashy pale and his big hands trembled, for the trouble which he had feared but not expected had come upon him.

"What's the matter, Pat?" sneeringly demanded the squaw man before the bar.

"Look there!"

In at the front door of the shanty stalked two stalwart Apaches, their half-naked bodies painted for the war-path, and their rifles and other weapons, with belts of abundant ammunition, showing how formidable they could be if provoked.

In at the back door stepped a third.

It was far from Paddy Byrne's wish to provoke them, and his only hope was that they might not want his scalp.

"Who are they, and what do they want?" he whispered to Stebbins.

"Customers, I reckon, and it's likely that they want whisky. Say, Pat, what has become of that slab-sided cuss who was here a while ago?"

"Gone down the valley, headin' for San Carlos."

"How long since?"

"Less 'n half an hour. Say, Misther Stebbins, if you'll take thim Injuns away, I'll give you all the money there is in the shop."

"Reckon I could take it if I wanted it. The Injuns are all right, Pat. You treat them well, and they'll treat you well."

With these words the squaw man walked out, mounted his horse, and rode away, leaving Paddy Byrne alone with the three Apaches.

The unfortunate Irishman was "between the devil and the deep sea."

Treating the savages well meant treating them to whisky.

If he should refuse to do so they might kill him, and if they should drink until they became drunk, they would be almost sure to kill him.

Despairingly he set out on his rude bar a bottle and some glasses.

The Apaches were sufficiently civilized to understand this hint, and the three of them stepped briskly forward without waiting for any further invitation.

They paid no attention to the glasses, which they despised as unnecessary articles of luxury, and the first of them at the bar seized the bottle and put it to his lips.

The others grunted, growled and made threatening gestures at the Irishman, which could only be interpreted as meaning that more bottles must be forthcoming.

Paddy Byrne perceived that there was no hope for him, and that his only chance was to sell his life at a better price than he was likely to get for his liquor.

He stooped for another bottle, at the same time reaching for his revolver, though there was still a doubt as to whether his rude customers meant peace or war.

They settled that doubt for him without the least ceremony or hesitation.

As he rose from behind the bar, the savage who held the bottle brought it down on his head with a blow that sent glass and liquor flying.

What did they care for a few drops more or less of the firewater?

They doubtless thought, to parody the words of the poet:

"No pent-up Utica contracts our powers;
The whole unbounded whisky mill is ours."

Paddy Byrne fell like a log.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SLABSIDED ONE.

As for Zeke Stebbins, he took no further interest in what might happen at Paddy Byrne's hostelry, but rode away down the valley as if he had nothing to do with the Irishman or his unwelcome visitors.

It might have been reasonable to suspect that he had brought the visitors there, and it was not to be supposed that he felt any fear of them, though he left the shanty in such a hurry that he forgot to take away a bit of his property.

In pulling out his handkerchief there, he pulled out with it a bit of paper which escaped his notice.

His inquiry after Ephraim Cronkhite had evidently not been without a purpose, as he followed the road which the man from Michigan must have taken, as if with the desire of overhauling him.

Yet he did not ride rapidly, as there was no occasion for hurry.

He could not have failed to notice that Cronkhite rode a lean, scrawny and ill-conditioned beast, which any respectable horse could pursue successfully without taxing its energies.

Consequently he ambled along at a steady and decent gait, without pressing his steed, probably supposing that he would soon come in sight of the lanky man and his bag o' bones.

After traveling in that style a couple of hours or so, without catching sight of anything moving ahead of him he was forced to the conclusion that there must be a mistake somewhere.

Either Paddy Byrne had lied to him concerning the direction and the road taken by the Michigander, or the aforesaid bag o' bones had more speed and bottom than it had been credited with.

The squaw man was well aware of the fact that such unpromising beasts occasionally developed a surprising amount of "git thar," and it was quite likely that Cronkhite's horse might be one of that kind, though it was not to be presumed that its rider would be in any special hurry.

Therefore Zeke Stebbins pushed his horse to

a good pace, determined to overtake the man he was pursuing pretty soon, if he should be on that road.

It was not until near nightfall that he overtook him, and then, judging by the position and appearance of the Indian lover, he was in no great haste to get to San Carlos.

Ephraim Cronkhite was seated at the side of the road, while his horse was hitched to a bush near by, and he was apparently dividing his time between meditation and the munching of some cold victuals which he had taken from his saddle-bags.

He seemed to be not in the least surprised or disturbed by the rapid approach of another traveler, and did not move until Stebbins halted and dismounted near him.

Then he rose hastily and advanced to the squaw man, giving him his hand with an ejaculation of pleasure at the meeting.

"I am truly glad to see you," said he, "though I had hoped when I heard the galloping of your horse that it might be one of our Indian friends who was coming this way."

Zeke Stebbins stared at Cronkhite with astonishment, as if wondering whether the man was a fool, or was trying to make a fool of him.

"You mought ha' struck some of 'em," said he, "if you had stopped at Pat Byrne's a little while longer; or some of 'em mought ha' struck you, which amounts to the same thing."

"I have been anxious to meet you, my friend," continued the Michigander, who was evidently intent upon pursuing his own course of thought.

"Your views and sentiments concerning the rights and wrongs of the unfortunate aborigines coincide so exactly with mine, that the call of a common humanity must compel us to act in concert to cooperate in devising some plan for the amelioration of the lot of our red brethren."

Zeke Stebbins stared until his eyes bulged.

Surely the Michigander must be a crazy man, and why did his friends allow him to run at large?

"Say, stranger, you're a notch or so above my reach. Durn my skin if I kin understand a bit of what you've been sayin'."

"Really?" inquired Cronkhite with a bland smile.

"Sart'in an' sure. Did you swaller a stack o' dictionaries afore you struck this latitood?"

"All the better," answered the missionary.

"You are, then, as I had supposed you to be, a simple child of nature, unaccustomed to the brutal and fallacious arguments of our so-called civilization. Cradled in the lap of nature, the greater part of your existence has been passed among the untaught aborigines, and you are experienced only in the plain manner of speech that is common to the children of the wilderness."

"Climb down, I say!" roared the squaw man.

"If you git up any higher, I'll have to shute to bring you down."

He was almost convinced that his companion was crazy, but could not help feeling a high respect for the man who could turn upon him such a flood of language as to swamp him.

"I understand you, Mr. Stebbins. You wish me to speak more plainly, and I shall do so. As our thoughts and feelings agree so well, I think that we ought to try to work together to help the poor Indians."

"As how?" inquired Stebbins.

"You, with your knowledge of the language and customs of the red-men, and I with my eloquence and influence among the white men, ought to be able to induce the two races to live in peace, and to refrain from oppressing and slaughtering each other."

"Thar you go ag'in! Say, mister, have you got any friends?"

"Friends? I have many friends. All the friends of the red-man are my friends, and such are numerous in the States of the East. Yes, the red-man has many friends, and it is only necessary to establish a connection between him, and them, in order that their benefit may reach him, and be appreciated by him."

"Jest so, though I wish I may be kicked to death by a spavined mule if I know what you mean. Did the Gov'ment send you out here?"

"It did not. The Government is in this matter a combination of cruelty and avarice, and I wish to have nothing to do with it."

"You ain't one o' them Quaker chaps, then—what they call the peace policy men?"

"I believe in the policy of peace, but despise and abominate the Quakers."

"Sorter come out on your own footin', I reckon," suggested the squawman.

"I was sent out, my friend, as an agent of the Society for Improving the Condition of the Indians, and that is the form and substance of my business here."

"Is it a scheme that pays well?"

"It is not a question of pay, though my expenses are guaranteed."

"As I understand the thing, stranger, you want to hire me to help you kerry on that business."

"I have plainly informed you that I would be glad to have your aid."

"What pay'll I git?"

"As I have already said, it is not a question of pay."

"But I'll need suthin' fur expenses. How much'll you gi' me to start?"

"How much will you want?"

"All you've got."

This was plain and blunt enough; but the Michigander did not seem to take in the meaning of the words.

"Really, my friend," he calmly replied, "I fail to understand you. Perhaps you mean to say that you want all I can spare."

"I don't mean nothin' o' the kind. I mean jest what I said. We won't have no more foolin' about this, mister. I want your money, every dollar of it. That's what I follered you down here fur, and that's what I mean to have. Hand it over, if you don't want to git hurt."

"This is very sad and disappointing," observed Ephraim Cronkhite. "I hoped to find in you a trusty and valuable friend in a good and glorious cause, and you prove to be a highwayman, demanding my money or my life. Is that what you mean?"

"Reckon you've got down about to the facts, mister."

The man from Michigan slowly arose and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"Don't you try to pull no gun!" fiercely ordered Zeke Stebbins. "If you do, I'll blow a hole through you quicker'n you could wink."

"There is not a weapon upon my person," mildly answered the missionary. "If my cause cannot succeed without the employment of firearms, it deserves to fail."

He showed his empty hands, somewhat to the relief of his adversary.

"You see this," said Stebbins, as he pointed to his cocked revolver.

"I do. It appears to be a deadly weapon."

"You jest bet it is, and I mean business right straight along. Hand your money over right away, and I'll let you go. If you don't, off comes the roof o' your head!"

The missionary gazed calmly at the leveled revolver, as if he considered it an object of curiosity, rather than of fear.

"Truly I have been told," said he, "that the white man in these parts is worse than the Indian; but I had not expected that the truth would be brought home to me in this wise. I cannot comply with your demand, my friend, and I fear that I may be forced to handle you roughly unless you desist from your unlawful proceedings."

"Shut up your talk shop!" yelled the squaw man. "Hand over that money, and be quick about it."

"I have no deadly weapons, as I assured you, but such as the Lord hath bestowed upon me I will use in mine own defense."

Suddenly, and with the swiftness of lightning, the lanky man's two long arms shot out like those of an octopus, and Zeke Stebbins, who had not looked for any such demonstration, was taken off his guard.

One of the bony hands knocked up his pistol, which was discharged harmlessly, and the other clutched him by the throat.

Then both of them seized him by the neck and waistband, lifted him up in spite of his struggles, and flung him forcibly upon the ground.

His head struck a stone, and he lay there senseless.

"He will recover shortly," said Ephraim Cronkhite as he bent down and examined his defeated adversary. "In the meantime I will leave this place, which speaks to me now of nothing but sorrow and disappointment."

He mounted his bony horse, and that architectural steed started down the valley at an astonishingly rapid gait.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEKING A PLACE OF SAFETY.

JACK BUNN'S three friends of the telegraph service were badly upset by the Apache invasion of the shanty.

In vain he explained to them that those redskins were nothing but tame Apaches, mere loafers, too much demoralized to do anything but beg or steal.

The unexpected appearance and fierce looks of those red loafers had given the young men a shock from which they did not care to recover, and they firmly declared their intention of leaving the shanty as soon as they could get away.

At daylight they were mounted and off, their purpose being to travel by the most direct route possible to a settlement where they would be safe.

Bunn and Stepney were a little lonesome after the departure of their comrades, but managed to pass the time pleasantly enough, considering the circumstances.

They could not help feeling that their situation was ticklish, to say the least of it, and it is probable that both thought that they would do well to get away from there, though neither liked to broach the subject of decamping.

Mark Stepney was the first to suggest it, and was surprised to perceive that his comrade opposed the motion.

"I don't think we need be in a hurry," said Jack. "I may receive important news, or be able to send some, and I ought to stay here as long as it is safe."

"But it is not safe," insisted Mark.

"That man we met at Pat Byrne's—Hark Sarpy they called him—said that it might be safe for two or three days yet, and he gave me to understand that he would look in on me shortly. I would rather wait for him, if you are willing."

"Just as you please, Jack. If that man said that he would be here, I think we may depend upon him to come in time to warn us of danger, and we will wait for him."

It was early in the afternoon when Mark Stepney, who had gone out on the ridge to reconnoiter, perceived a horseman approaching from the direction opposite to that by which he and Jack Bunn had reached the shanty.

"Here he is, Jack!" shouted Stepney. "Here comes Hark Sarpy!"

Jack Bunn ran out instantly, and both the young men joyfully greeted the horseman.

He seemed to them just then like a deliverer, a messenger with a reprieve, a person for whom they had been waiting to let them loose and show them the way to safety.

Hark Sarpy dismounted and entered the shanty with them.

"I got around here a little sooner than I expected to," said he. "The fact is, my young friends, that I discovered that the scare we were talking about at Byrne's is a worse piece of business than any of us had supposed it to be. It looks now as if all the Apaches in the Territory have gone on the war path. The hills are full of them, and there is no telling where they may be met. I have come to tell you that I think you had better get away from here."

"We are very thankful to you for coming," answered Jack, "and for my part I am more than willing to slide out."

"Where are the others? I understood you to say that you had three friends here."

"They went away early this morning, scared off by a couple of loafing red skins who looked in on us last night."

"I hope they are safe; but it won't do to bet on anything just now. I reckon, Mr. Bunn, that we may as well trot along."

Jack Bunn filled his cartridge belts with all the ammunition they would carry, and hid the rest under the floor of the shanty.

Then he picked up a queer little machine, which he placed in a leather case that had a strap for carrying it over his shoulder.

"What's that?" inquired Stepney.

"That is a thief."

"A thief? What sort of a thief?"

"A telegraph thief. It contains a small instrument and something more. I can climb a pole, attach my wire there, and send a message in any direction. The something else is something of my own invention. It is an arrangement for storing up electricity and keeping it on hand until it is wanted. I call it a storage battery. I was going to apply for a patent when I learned that some Frenchman had got ahead of me—way ahead, I believe—and then I made a little one, so that I could use it with my thief."

"Is it worth while to carry it away now, Jack?"

"We may have a use for it, and it is a pet of mine. Perhaps, though, on second thought, I may as well leave it. I've got a dynamite cartridge, and I could arrange that with the machine so that if any stray Apaches should happen in here when I am away, it would blow them to kingdom come."

"That is 'most too good a scheme," observed Hark Sarpy. "Some white men might happen along instead of the Apaches."

"You are right, Mr. Sarpy, and I will save my machine. I believe I will take the dynamite cartridge, too."

"Isn't that rather risky?"

"Not a bit of it. I know how to carry the little darling. Besides, this is the kind that needs an electric spark to explode it."

"All right. Take it along, then. There is more than a chance that we might find a use for it. Come on, boys! It seems to me that there is an Apache smell in the air. I hope your friends have got through safely."

Jack Bunn did not load himself up with any more incumbrances, but locked the door of the station and put the key in his pocket.

"That's business," he said. "Don't know but I ought to put a sign up, 'Back in ten minutes.'"

The three men mounted their horses and rode away, Hark Sarpy in the lead.

They rode down the glen into the valley, and soon came in sight of Pat Byrne's hostelry.

"We will ride up there and see if all is right at the Irishman's," said the guide. "If he hasn't got away from there, it is time for him to be starting."

Everything seemed to be right at Pat Byrne's, and there was not the least indication of trouble or harm.

The front door stood open, as was usually the case at that time of the year, and the shanty was quiet as if the proprietor, in the lack of custom, was sleeping away the long hours of the afternoon.

"It looks right," muttered the guide, "but it seems to me I smell Apache."

He dismounted with his two friends, and they walked quietly to the open door and looked in.

The sight that met their eyes was enough to send a chill through the hottest blood.

Paddy Byrne had gone away, but to another world.

He lay on the floor near the entrance, with his head toward the open door, and from the top of his head the scalp had been stripped,

"As you peel a fig when the fruit is fresh,"

leaving a bloody patch of nearly fleshless skull, though then somewhat dried, upon which the flies had settled thickly.

There could be no doubt that the Irishman was dead, but who had killed him?

It was not necessary to look far for an answer to this question.

Of course his murderers were Apaches, and there they were, right before the eyes of the gazers.

Not a bit formidable were they just then, but, at least for a time, helpless and at the mercy of any avenger who might come along.

And the avenger had arrived!

Three stalwart savages lay on the floor, none of them far from their victim, and all apparently in a drunken stupor.

They had first slaughtered the proprietor of the hostelry, and had then been laid out by his liquor.

The "stuff" was the real avenger of Pat Byrne.

Hark Sarpy took his companions by the arms and led them away from the shanty a few steps.

"I thought I smelt Apache," said he, "and now we all know what it means. Boys, I reckon you had better go a little further back, as you won't want to mix in this. I will attend to what needs to be done."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Stepney.

"I am going to civilize those Apaches."

Leaving his young friends with the horses, he returned quickly and entered the shanty.

Directly they heard the sound of a slight scuffle, followed by a heavy fall.

Then Hark Sarpy came out, closing the door behind him.

"He has murdered them in cold blood," whispered Jack Bunn.

"Better so than that they should not be killed," answered Stepney. "I would have hated to do the job, but I am glad that it is done."

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE MURDEROUS WORK.

HARK SARPY made no report to the young men of what had happened in the shanty, and they made no inquiries.

If they had insisted upon knowing, he might have told them that his work had been quick and sure; that he had stabbed two of the murderous red-skins to the heart as they lay in a drunken stupor; that the third had been aroused and had attempted a resistance which had been most effectually overcome.

There were three dead Apaches and one dead Irishman in there with the barrels and kegs, and bottles of liquor, and the guide looked back at the building wistfully when he had reached his friends.

"It would be a good thing," he said, "to touch a light to that shanty and give poor Pat a fiery funeral, but the blaze would be sure to draw all the Apaches within range, and there may be a score of them."

"It will be safest to leave things as they are," observed Stepney.

"No doubt of that, especially as I have reason to believe that the woods and hills about here are full of red-skins, and that Zeke Stebbins is engineering the raid. He was here with the party that killed Pat Byrne."

"How do you know that?" inquired Mark.

"He left his traces plain enough. Here is a letter addressed to him that I picked up on the floor of the shanty, and of course he had dropped it there. It is a very important matter, too. Read it."

Both the young men read the letter, which informed Zeke Stebbins that a box of rifles and cartridges had been shipped to him by Express to San Rafael.

"That stuff is for the hostile Apaches," said Sarpy. "There can be no doubt of that. Zeke Stebbins has been their secret agent and spy for a long time, and if I needed any proof that he is still with them, the fact that he was with the wretches who killed Paddy Byrne is enough."

"Quite enough," assented Stepney.

"This is very important, as I said. The rifles are meant for the Apaches, and they are to get them through Zeke Stebbins. Probably he has gone on to San Rafael to look after that business. It would be a fine stroke to stop it, if we could only get word down there in time."

"There's no trouble about that," broke in Jack Bunn. "If the line is not cut, and I don't believe it is, I can send word to headquarters and to San Rafael as easy as rolling off a log."

"Do it, then. It may save some lives, even if it should not result in catching a scoundrel."

The young telegraph operator speedily made ready his "thief," climbed an adjoining tele-

graph pole, connected his fine wire with the main wire, and hastily descended.

He tried a "call," just as if he had been in his own station, and got an answer.

"Seize at San Rafael box of rifles and ammunition addressed to Ezekiel Stebbins, a secret agent and spy of the Apaches. Hostiles all about here. They have killed Pat Byrne where we are. I am with Hark Sarpy and Mark Stepney, of Powell's command. This is reliable and needs immediate attention."

Jack reported to his friends what he had done and the message he had sent.

"That is right," said the guide. "Pick up your tools and come along. I'm thinking that we will have to look out for ourselves right sharp."

It was near sunset when they were mounted and ready to start, and the question then was what point they should aim at, and what direction they should take to reach it.

Jack Bunn naturally wanted to strike out straight for the settlements, and Stepney was willing to accompany him; but there were objections to this course, which the guide pointed out.

"The chances are," said he, "that there are hostile Apaches all about here, and we can't tell where we may find them—or where they may find us, for that matter. But it is quite certain that it won't do to trust ourselves to this road or any other road. We might not see them anywhere on it; but they would be likely to see us and shoot us down from behind the rocks or trees. Our safest plan will be to take to the hills, and we must be very careful there, as the Apaches are the best sneaks in the world."

It was agreed that they should risk riding down the road for a mile or so, and should then strike off into the hills through a pass which, if not absolutely safe, would lead them to a place of safety.

"I don't exactly understand this business," said Mark Stepney, as they rode on. "From what you say, Mr. Sarpy, I am led to infer that the Apaches scatter. Do they never travel in droves or bands?"

"Seldom, if ever, until they reach their rendezvous in the southern part of the Territory, where they are safe in the range of the Sierras and can defy the world to catch them. Those who break away from the reservation go singly or in bunches, and they have their own way of telegraphing an intended uprising to their comrades in the hills. It is astonishing how quick the news is carried among them. Then the loose Apaches make their way down to the rendezvous, and they go by ones or twos, but always in small bodies, stopping on the way to murder any defenseless settlers they may meet, as they treated poor Pat Byrne."

"That account is settled, anyhow," observed Jack Bunn.

"As far as it can be. Those Apaches will never do any more killing. But I must confess that I am uneasy about your three friends who left you this morning. If they went straight down the road they have run a big risk."

They had gone straight down the road, and had run a big risk.

The guide's serious misgivings unfortunately proved to be presentiments of the fate that had befallen the poor fellows.

When the party of three reached the point where Hark Sarpy had determined to strike off into the hills, they found there a sad and shocking sight.

At the side of the road lay two white men, killed, scalped, and horribly mutilated.

Their bodies had been so roughly treated that Jack Bunn had difficulty in recognizing them as those of two of his late companions, Beebe and Leavenworth.

Nothing more was needed to awaken the two young men to a sense of the dangers they had escaped and of those that still encompassed them.

That the two fine lads who had been so jolly with them the night before, and who had left them in good health and spirits that morning, should have so soon met such a horrible death, was saddening in the extreme.

Their only consolation was found in the thought that one of their friends must have escaped the slaughter.

Though darkness was rapidly coming on, Hark Sarpy made a careful examination of the scene, and drew his conclusions from the indications he found there.

"It's just as I have been telling you," said he. "No traveled road is safe in this region. The boys were riding along here, suspecting no danger, when they were fired on from the mouth of the pass here, by sneaking red-skins who had been waiting for them. Two of them were knocked off their horses at once, and there is what is left of those two."

"And why not the third?" inquired Mark Stepney. "How did he happen to get away?"

"The signs speak of only two Indians, and the other man must have got out of range with the horses before they could fire another shot. I hope he has not escaped to fall into the hands of another party."

"Perhaps he was pursued," suggested Jack.

"Not a bit of it. You can see that they

stopped here to finish their bloody work. Besides, they had no horses."

"No horses?"

"They mostly travel on foot until they reach the rendezvous, where they can find plenty of horses if they want them. That is what makes them so dangerous. Mounted men can no more pursue them than they can hunt rattlesnakes. They can go wherever the wildcat or the wolf can go, and are as silent and secret as the wildcat or the wolf. But we have no time to waste in talk, my friends. We must try to put these poor fellows under the ground."

"If you will give me a little time," suggested Jack Bunn, "I think I can get a message off, to tell the people below what has happened here."

This was assented to, and the guide and Mark roughly buried the remains of the unfortunate telegraphers, while Jack climbed an adjoining pole and adjusted his "thief."

He found the line intact, and had no difficulty in sending his news.

It seemed above all things strange to the young men that right at the side of such an evidence of civilization as a telegraph line such savage atrocities could occur, and yet the line remained in good working order.

The sad task of sepulture was hardly finished, when the trampling of horses was heard down the road.

"Can those be Apaches?" demanded Jack Bunn, as he seized his rifle.

"No, indeed," answered the guide. "If they were Apaches you wouldn't hear them. Those men are mounted on shod horses, and they are coming this way. Therefore they are white men."

The mounted party rapidly drew nearer, and from the amount and regularity of the sound the guide drew another inference.

"They are blue-coats," he said—"some of Uncle Sam's soldiers—tiring their horses out for no good."

As soon as they came in sight in the darkness he stepped out and hailed them.

It was clearly an American hail, and was promptly answered.

The next moment the party rode up to where Sarpy and his friends were standing.

They were twenty cavalymen, with two pack-horses—evidently an expeditionary force that did not expect to return to their quarters very soon.

"Is that you, Hark Sarpy?" demanded the officer at their head.

"Just me, Captain Lang, with two young friends of mine that I picked up above here."

"I am very glad to meet you, as you can give me some straight news if anybody can. There are so many queer and contradictory reports flying around that I don't know what to believe. Have any hostiles been seen about here?"

"They have been both seen and felt, Captain Lang."

"The deuce you say! Glad that I am getting on the trail of them at last. Where and in what force were they?"

"Pretty much all about, as well as I can judge, and they don't stay to be counted. We have just buried here two young men—telegraph boys—who were killed by them to-day."

"Mercy on us! That is not the kind of evidence that I am glad to get hold of."

"There were three in the party who were waylaid here, and one of them got away. Should think you might have met him down the road."

"We would not have been likely to if he kept straight on, as we crossed the range from the San Carlos, and struck this road not far below here. We are going on as far north as Benham's and then we are to flank the range and go down the valley."

"I am afraid, Cap," observed Sarpy, "that you will only succeed in getting to the rear of the hostiles. If you will allow me to offer a bit of advice, I should say that you had better go down to the forks of the river and try to head them off there."

"Can't do it, old man. I have my orders, and must obey them. I suppose that matter will be attended to below. I must go on to Benham's, anyhow."

"You will find more Apache sign about a mile up the road, Captain Lang. At Pat Byrne's place you will find him dead and scalped. You will find three dead Apaches there, too."

"This business is getting more serious. I think I can guess who is responsible for making a finish of those Apaches. Tell me more, Hark. Give me all the news you've got, and be as quick about it as you can."

Nobody could pack more news into a small compass and tell it more quickly than Hark Sarpy.

He briefly covered all the facts of which he had absolute knowledge by relating what had happened since he met his two young friends that day, not neglecting to detail his suspicions of Zeke Stebbins, and the manner in which news had been sent down the line by Jack Bunn.

To this he had nothing to add with the exception of his general belief that hostiles were scattered rather miscellaneous through the hills.

"This is all useful information," said Captain Lang, "and you three have done some valuable work to-day. I wish I could believe that I might do as well, but am afraid that I shall not succeed in picking up anything besides information. Would the young gentlemen like to go with me?"

"Would you?" inquired Hark, as he turned to his friends.

A wistful look and tone in this query might have told them that he would prefer their company, and they were by no means inclined to leave him.

"I would rather go with you," quickly answered Mark.

"And so would I," added Jack.

"Good-by, then, and good luck to you!" was the parting salutation of Captain Lang as he rode off at the head of his detachment.

CHAPTER IX.

PERILS OF THE PASS.

"THERE they go on a wild goose chase," said Hark Sarpy, as the cavalymen passed out of sight; "yet I don't know, boys, but it might have been better for you if you had gone with them."

"They are going far away from the point we want to reach," remarked Jack Bunn, "and I don't care to take the back track. I think we will be apt to get there sooner if we follow you, and I feel quite as safe with you as I would with them."

Mark Stepney assented to this opinion.

"I ain't so sure about the safety of it," answered the guide; "but I've kinder taken a fancy to you chaps, and am glad to have you with me. So you may be sure that I will do the best I can. Come on, then!"

The two young men mounted and followed their leader into the pass.

It was a narrow and rugged defile, but not what might be called a canyon, the sides being mountain heights instead of cliffs, broken and irregular, with many queer escarpments and uncouth formations, the whole covered in patches with the nut pine and other mountain growths.

It was, indeed, a break in the original formation of the wild and intricate Mogollon range, and presented to the travelers a sure but difficult pass, in which those who were unacquainted with it might easily lose themselves.

Occasionally smaller gullies led from the left or the right into the main defile, which broadened in spots so that it might almost deserve to be called a valley.

It was quite dark when they entered the pass, and the darkness grew denser as they got further in.

As the route was anything but an easy one to travel, even in daylight, the young men did not attempt to guide their horses, but gave them the rein, and they tramped steadily but cautiously in the wake of the guide, whose sure-footed mare went on as if she knew every inch of the way.

Thus they traversed the defile for about two hours, until they came to one of the valley-like openings that have been mentioned.

It seemed to tempt them to stop, and they did stop.

Hark Sarpy dismounted, and his companions gladly followed his example.

"It looks as if it ought to be safe to camp here," said he, "though it's hard telling. We will try the scheme for a while, anyhow, and see how it works."

"All right!" joyfully responded Jack Bunn as he tethered his horses. "I'll have a fire started in a jiffy, and I reckon we've got victuals enough among us for a good supper."

"Stop right there!" ordered the guide. "You will have to eat your victuals cold, as we won't start a sign of a fire this night."

"Why so?"

"Because we don't want to lose our scalps—that's why. Because the Apaches are just as likely to be near as anywhere else, and the sight or smell of a fire would draw them like flies to a sugar-pot."

"All right, again. Better luck some other time."

"That's not the only point that's got to be looked after," observed the guide. "We must get rid of our horses."

"Get rid of our horses?" exclaimed Mark, more astonished than Jack had been. "What does that mean?"

"It means that we can get along as well without them as with them in these hills, if not a little better. It means that the least snort or stamp or whinny might bring some lurking red-skins down on us, and they creep as quickly as the rattlesnake, and strike without stopping to rattle. It means that we can't afford to be bothered with horses here, any more than the Apaches can. If we mean to beat them, we must play their own game."

"Very well, Mr. Sarpy. You must do as you think best. We believe in you implicitly, and we rely upon you to pull us through."

"I will do the best I can for you, boys—that is all I can say."

"But how will we get rid of the horses?"

"I will turn them loose and send them away."

"And what will become of them then?"

"With my mare to lead them, I know just where they will bring up, and we will find them to-morrow if we live. Let us try to eat a bite, now, and then we will think about getting a little sleep."

The late and cold supper which the party proceeded to discuss was cheerless and unsatisfactory without light or fire; but the three were hungry, and appetite lent its sauce to the meal.

Hark Sarpy was the first to finish, and his next business was to get rid of the horses.

He made their bridles fast to the saddles, ranged them in single file, with their heads up the valley, and his mare in the lead, and then spoke to the mare.

With a little snort, as if she understood him, she started off, followed by the other two, and they were soon out of sight.

Hark was not yet satisfied with the precautions he had taken.

If he was disposed to err in any direction, it would surely be on the side of excessive caution.

"Now, boys," said he, "if you want to snooze, just coil up and do the best you can at it. I'm going to scout about here and down the pass a bit, to make things as sure as I can."

The young men, however, were not inclined to sleep, at least while he was away.

The novelty of the situation and the sense of insecurity were enough of themselves to keep them awake.

"Any objection to smoking, Mr. Sarpy?" inquired Jack.

"Well, I reckon not, if you don't do too much of it. There ain't any wind, and the smoke will go right up, and perhaps a few whiffs won't do any harm; but you had better keep your tools handy, as there's no telling what may happen."

Hark glided away, after saying that he would be gone but a little while, and the young men filled and lighted their pipes.

They did not get a vast amount of consolation out of smoking in the darkness; but it was better than no smoke, and they puffed away placidly, talking of their strange guide, and the unpleasant position in which the eccentricities of the Apaches had placed them.

At the same time they kept their rifles ready at their sides, and their pistols loosened in their belts, watching as carefully as possible, or believing that they did, for indications of any hostile approach.

Yet this fancied watchfulness proved to be an utter delusion.

Nothing could have astonished them more than the sudden appearance of a man before them, as if he had risen out of the ground.

They grabbed their weapons, but were quickly reassured by the welcome sound of Hark Sarpy's voice:

"Sorry I scared you, boys. You ought to use your eyes and ears better. Listen, now, and be quiet. There are five Apaches coming up the pass, and they will soon be here. We must get out of this."

"Will we have to run for it?" asked Mark in a tone of disgust.

"Not far. Only up the side of the hill here. I marked the spot some time ago. There is a capital place to hide behind a rock, and we mustn't miss a chance to take pay for the lives of the poor boys we buried."

The young men may have thought that their leader was inclined to be bloodthirsty, and that it was not in the contract that they should be drawn into a fight; but they gave no sort of an expression to such an idea.

They arose and placed themselves under his orders without the least hesitation.

"How soon will they be here?" asked Jack.

"If they keep on coming, and I reckon they will, stay about fifteen minutes."

"They will be sure to find our sign and stop here."

"More than likely they will."

"Then I can set a trap for them. I am glad I brought that dynamite cartridge. Take my rifle, Mark, and go on with Mr. Sarpy. I will bring up the rear."

"Hope you know what you are doing," remarked the guide. "That thing is sorter risky."

"I will make it risky for the reds, bet your life. Go right on, and don't mind me."

As his companions started to climb the hill the young telegrapher attached the wire from his "thief" to the dynamite cartridge, which he laid at the side of a rock and partly under it.

Then he followed his friends, concealing the wire as well as he could until he started up the hill, when he let it trail behind him, uncoiling it as he climbed.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed when he reached the spot which Hark had selected for a hiding-place, "this seems to be a special providence. I have just wire enough to reach here, and not a foot more."

Nothing better could have suited the party as a hiding place than the point at which they had halted, though they might have preferred, in view of the expected performance of the dynamite, that they should be a little further from the possible explosion.

Jack Bunn, however, who controlled that portion of the programme, was quite serene, and the others, trusting in his skill, began to partake of his serenity.

A large and jagged rock jutted out from the side of the hill, between which and the main body of the mountain was a considerable space, amply sufficient for all the purposes of the party.

At the same time it afforded them a direct and unobstructed view of their late camping-place, within easy rifle range, allowing them to see without being seen.

"Glad that you happened to have wire enough, Jack," observed Mark, when they had settled into their new position: "but it seems to me that your current may get lost in the ground."

"No danger of that, I think. The wire is insulated after an idea of my own, and there is lots of force in my storage battery. I will guarantee the wire if nothing happens to upset the scheme, and all the chances are in its favor."

He arranged his battery and wires so as to start the current when he pleased, and the party quieted down and waited for the Apaches.

CHAPTER X.

THE RESOURCES OF CIVILIZATION.

THE hostiles came on and reached the little valley-like hole in the pass as Hark Sarpy had predicted—not quite so soon as he had said they might come, but soon enough.

They came so silently and stealthily in the darkness that his quick eyes and ears informed him of their presence before the others were aware of their arrival.

In single file they came, each with a rifle in his hand, and uttering no sound until they reached the late camping-place of the white men.

Then a sudden halt and a few low guttural exclamations showed that they had discovered something, or that they had concluded to camp there.

It was soon evident to Hark Sarpy that they had made a discovery there.

"They have found our sign," he whispered, "and are going to study it out."

This was by no means plain to the young men, who could see nothing below but some dark forms of whose movements or intentions they could form no clear idea.

"I only hope that they won't trip up on my wire and break it," muttered Jack Bunn.

"If that thing should go off," whispered the guide, "wouldn't it be apt to play the wild with us as well as with the reds?"

"You will see pretty soon, if nothing happens to spoil the game."

"See? I am afraid we will feel more than we will see."

"Just you trust to me, Mr. Sarpy. If it does its full work down yonder I won't worry about anything else. What are they doing now?"

"Examining our sign and looking after the horse-tracks. You can see them well enough now, as they have made a light."

In fact, one of the savages had lighted a torch, and was going up the pass with one of his comrades, crouching and carefully examining the ground as they went.

They did not go far, but soon returned with the torch to their waiting companions, to whom they apparently made a report.

"It is God's blessing that we sent away the horses," said Sarpy. "The reds have come to the conclusion that we stopped there but a little while and went on. Of course they suppose that we are on our horses, and that it won't be worth while to follow us. So they are going to camp for the night, I reckon."

"Shall I give them the send-off?" whispered Jack.

"Not yet. Wait till they get in a huddle."

"I am afraid they may break my wire."

"Wait a bit, anyhow."

It was soon made evident that the Apaches were not only going to camp, but meant to camp more comfortably than their predecessors had dared to do.

They were building a fire, and its cheerful blaze quickly made the scene brighter, but at the same time more fearful.

It seemed that they could afford less precautions than the whites were obliged to use toward them, showing that they held the skill of their enemies in utter contempt.

The blaze of the fire lighted up the glen, bringing out into bold relief the bronze forms of five half-naked savages, hideously painted in the highest style of aboriginal art, no two of them daubed alike.

They were plumed as well as painted for the war-path, and it could be seen that they were fully armed with modern weapons, thanks to the friendship or avarice of such go-betweens as Zeke Stebbins.

An unpleasant feature of the change of scene was the fact that it seemed to bring the Apaches nearer to their concealed foes, at the same time apparently diminishing the distance between the latter and the expected explosion.

Hark Sarpy cast an apprehensive glance at Jack Bunn and his battery.

"We could give them a rough deal from here with our rifles," said he: "but some of them might get away, and not one of the gang must leave this pass alive. I've good reasons for that."

"I rather hate to do it since I've seen them," muttered Jack.

"You ought to be glad of the chance. They deserve no more mercy than you would give a rattlesnake. Think of the way they slaughtered your two friends out at the road yonder. If they had a chance at you they would jump for it, and the death you would die wouldn't be near as easy as what we hope to give them. This is no time to be squeamish."

Jack was not squeamish, but he was new to the business, and his momentary shrinking from his terrible task was excusable.

The Apaches were making themselves comfortable after their own fashion, as if any interference with their plans by their white foes was the last thing to be thought of.

If they had known that Hark the Hater was looking down upon them from convenient shooting distance, their opinions would have undergone a decided change.

Shortly there was an interesting event among them.

"They have found your cartridge," whispered the guide to Jack Bunn.

"Shall I let her go?"

"Not just yet. Wait for the word."

A savage had discovered the dynamite cartridge at the side of the rock, and had called the attention of his comrades to it.

They gathered about the strange invention of the white man, evidently wondering what it was, and chattering with unaccustomed volubility.

One of them knelt down to examine it, and the others came closer to him.

"Let her go!" hissed Hark in Jack Bunn's ear.

Jack joined his two wires, and the crash was instantaneous.

Nothing had happened to "spoil the game," which could not possibly have been played more successfully.

The white men had crouched down behind the big rock that sheltered them; but the shock was such that for a few moments they seemed to be incapable of action.

It was not the noise, as the explosion had made no great uproar, but mainly the tremor like that of an earthquake, mounting far up the hillside, that shook and shocked them, leaving a feeling of dizziness and exhaustion.

They were aware of a strange odor in the air, accompanied by a cloud of dust and many flying missiles; but nothing harmed them, though bits of stone fell about them rather plentifully.

There was one thing of which they were certain—they heard no cry, nor any sound of a human voice, at the time of the explosion or after it.

The force of the dynamite had been exerted, as might have been expected, more in a downward than in an upward direction, and within a limited area, but it had done to perfection the work that it was intended to do.

It had shattered the rock against which it lay, and every bit of stone and gravel within the reach of its energy had been ground to powder or sent whirling through the air with tremendous velocity.

At the same time it had dug a deep hole in the earth, scattering the debris in all directions.

When the white men raised themselves and looked down, there was nothing to be seen or heard at their late encampment.

The fire had been utterly extinguished, and all was quiet.

"It is all over," remarked Mark Stepney. "The resources of civilization, as the Fenians call that sort of thing, were too much for the Apaches."

Jack Bunn occupied himself in hauling in and winding up his wire, and, to his great consolation, succeeded in saving nearly all of it.

"I suppose it is all over," observed Hark Sarpy; "but I want to be sure of that. Stay here, boys, and keep quiet, while I go down yonder and see how the scheme worked."

Nobody objected to this intention, and he carefully climbed down the side of the hill and passed out of the view of the young men.

They looked and listened as intently as they could, but failed to see or hear anything that was at all definite to them.

After a little while the guide returned as silently as he had departed, but not so suddenly as to startle them.

"It couldn't have worked better, boys," said he. "The whole outfit was blown to kingdom come so quick that they didn't know what hurt them."

"Were none of them left alive?" inquired Stepney.

"None of 'em are alive now," was the significant answer. "The murder of those two boys has been settled for."

"It seems that eight Apache lives have paid for the lives of three white men so far," remarked Jack Bunn. "If the hostiles should suffer

elsewhere as they have suffered about here, there ought not to be many of them left at the end of this outbreak."

"But they won't," retorted the guide. "We have been in the luck of it, and the soldiers scarcely amount to shucks. The whites will suffer more than the reds in the count up, and you may bet your bottom dollar on that. Don't worry about it any more, boys, but try to get some sleep while I keep watch."

"Why don't you get some sleep, too?" demanded Mark.

"Because I want to know what is going on. If there are any Apaches anywhere near here, the racket down yonder has started them up, and they will come to see what's the matter."

"But they won't be likely to find us up here," insisted Mark.

"I want to watch for them a little while, anyhow. Don't give yourselves any more bother, but go to sleep if you can."

CHAPTER XI.

A HOME IN THE HILLS.

THE young men coiled themselves up on the bare rock, and managed to get a fair sleep, in spite of their hard bed.

Before morning they discovered that the guide was snoozing there also; but he was astir as soon as the day broke, and they were quite willing to get up and stretch their aching limbs.

Hark Sarpy reported that he had waited for the arrival of more Apaches until he became pretty sure that none would appear, and it was reasonable to suppose that there were none in that vicinity.

The three scrambled down the hill and surveyed the devastation that had been wrought by the dynamite.

Most of the Apaches had been blown to pieces so suddenly and utterly that nothing was to be seen of them anywhere with the exception of bits of human limbs and fragments of human flesh that had been scattered in all directions.

These shattered relics of mortality were encountered in unexpected places as the party surveyed the scene, and were so sickening to look upon that they gladly withdrew from the spot.

They were first able to notice, however, that one stalwart savage, though badly wounded, had not been killed by the explosion, and there was visible a wound in the region of his heart which had doubtless been made by a knife-thrust, and which spoke of the care that Hark Sarpy had taken to leave no doubt of the results of the night's work.

A search for weapons resulted in the discovery of one rifle and one revolver, that were fit for use, together with the cartridge belts of the Apache who had been wounded.

These weapons were of a late pattern and excellent quality, and were apparently nearly new.

"I told you last night, boys," said the guide, "that none of these Apaches must be allowed to leave this place. I don't know but that may have sounded rather murderous to you; but I had a reason for it, as I said, and the reason why I was determined on making a finish of them was that they were too near home."

"Too near home?" repeated Mark. "Too near what home?"

"My home?"

"Do you mean to say that you have a home near this?"

"I do, indeed, and I am going to take you to it if you will go with me. You will be as safe there, I reckon, as you could be anywhere in these parts, and maybe it will surprise you a little, too."

The young men were more than willing to go with him, not only because of the promised safety, but because of the curiosity he had excited, and they followed him gladly.

After a little cold and unsatisfactory breakfast, which scarcely served to break their fast, he led them up the pass.

It gradually narrowed and became steeper and more difficult; but they pressed on vigorously and almost joyfully, fully believing that they would find better comfort at Hark Sarpy's "home."

Though their progress was slow, they had traveled not more than two hours when they were informed that they were near their destination.

They had then reached the highest point of the pass, and could perceive that beyond them it trended downward with a descent that was steeper than the ascent had been.

"Come on, boys!" ordered the guide, as he dodged behind a point of rock where no exit from the pass had been visible.

They followed him, and found themselves in a narrow cut or break of the mountain, barely wide enough for two to walk abreast, and with high walls of bare rock.

At the mouth of this passage was a deposit of sand and gravel, as if it was at times the bed of a mountain stream, and Hark examined this carefully.

"The horses are all right," said he. "Trust that mare of mine for knowing her business."

The young men understood what he meant when they saw the tracks of horses in the sand, leading them into the passage.

After he had brought his friends to the bare rock of the path, the guide went back and carefully blinded all the tracks.

"This hole looks safe enough," said he: "but it can't be made too safe, especially in such times as these. Come on, boys!"

He led them up a pretty steep path to the top of a hill or ridge, where the narrow pass debouched upon a small level, thickly covered with pebbles and small bowlders, apparently of lava, so compact that even the hoofs of the horses had left no visible impression upon them.

Crossing this level, the party found themselves at the base of a cliff that towered up perpendicularly to the height of perhaps a hundred feet.

There seemed to be no way of surmounting this obstacle; but the guide soon pointed out a path, the foot of which, like the entrance to the narrow pass below, was partially concealed by a mass of rock.

This path led up the side of the cliff at a rather steep angle, and though nature doubtless had much to do with its formation, it was plain that it had been largely extended and improved by human hands.

It was neither dangerous nor difficult to travel, though scarcely more than wide enough for one horse, and the guide merely cautioned his followers against slipping or stumbling.

Near the top of the cliff the path turned into the rock, through a narrow cut in which there were rude steps.

Hark Sarpy and his friends had hardly entered this cut when there came a sharp hail from a little distance above and beyond them.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"All right, Barney!" responded the guide, and in a few moments he led the young men out of the cut, and they found themselves on top of the cliff.

The scene which there met their eyes so amazed them that for a little while they were incapable of any speech but muttered ejaculations of wonder and delight.

The top of the cliff was a level and quite extensive plateau, covering a space of eight or ten acres.

It was considerably longer than it was broad, stretching from north to south, and the path which they had followed reached the top of the cliff near the southern end.

The soil that covered this plateau was apparently very rich, as it supported in great profusion the trees and shrubs and flowering plants peculiar to the region, together with some belonging to more northern latitudes, which thrived well at that elevation.

All were growing luxuriantly, and seemed not only to be well cared for, but to have been arranged with a view to the picturesqueness of their appearance.

A broad path or road, covered with reddish pebbles, and bordered with plants and shrubs, led between two rows of shady trees to a house at a little distance from the edge of the cliff.

The house was so surrounded and overgrown by greenery, that it could only be judged from that point that it was built of stone and somewhat in the manner of a fortification.

At the head of the path stood the man who had hailed the guide.

He was tall, erect and soldier-like in his appearance, and had an unmistakable Irish face, though there was not much of the brogue in his speech.

He seemed to be overjoyed at seeing Hark Sarpy, who shook hands with him and greeted him cordially.

"These are my two friends, Barney," said the guide—"Mr. Stepney and Mr. Bunn. Gentlemen, this is Barney Driscoll, a good and true man. He used to be a soldier, but he don't want that fact to be generally known, as he left the service without the consent of the authorities."

"Glad you've all got here safe, sor," observed Barney, as his face reddened a bit.

"Yes, we are safe and sound. All well here, Barney?"

"Yis, sor, and Miss Hettie 'll be powerful glad to see you."

The ex-soldier put a whistle to his mouth and sounded a shrill call.

CHAPTER XII.

BELLA VISTA THE BEAUTIFUL.

HARK SARPY led his friends up the graveled path, and they had not gone far when their amazement and delight were greatly increased.

From the direction of the house, doubtless in answer to the whistle call, came a girl who moved so swiftly and lightly that it would be pardonable to speak of her as flying.

This girl deserved to be called a young lady, as she was out of her teens, and was surely every inch a lady.

In a few moments she was in the arms of the guide, hugging and kissing in a style that could not fail to arouse the envy of the young men.

"It's all right, dear," said Hark, gently extricating himself from her embrace. "I am safe and well, as you see. But you must remember that I have some friends here. Gentlemen, this is my daughter, Hester Sarpy. Hettie, this is Mr. Mark Stepney, and this is Mr. Jack Bunn."

She acknowledged the introduction gracefully and with a smile.

"These are the two friends who were to come with you, father," she said.

This remark added to the amazement of Mark and Jack, who wondered by what sort of telegraphy the young lady had been informed of their expected arrival.

"Beg your pardon, Miss Sarpy," said the former, "but I wish you would kindly inform me how you knew that we were coming?"

"Oh, that is simple enough," she merrily answered. "When Pepita, father's favorite horse, came home leading two other horses, and we knew that they were white men's horses, and their bridles were tied to the saddles just as he always ties Pepita's when he sends her home, it was easy to guess that two friends were coming on with him."

"Then our horses are both here?"

"Safe and well cared for, and I am very glad to see you both, and I know that you must be fearfully hungry, and you will excuse me if I run away and see about getting some dinner for you."

She did run away, as lightly as a bird flies, leaving the two young men to follow more leisurely with her father, wondering at all they saw, but especially at the fair vision that fled before them.

"There is one point, boys," observed Sarpy, "which you will do me a favor to remember while you are here. I wish you would not make any mention in my daughter's hearing of the Apaches we have met, or of what happened to them. She supposes that I have been away on business, but does not know what sort of business it is, and I don't care to enlighten her. Though her mother and brother were murdered by the Indians, and her sister was carried away, I fancy that she does not like to hear of the death even of her enemies, and I am careful not to speak of such matters before her."

The young men promised that they would make no allusion to such unpleasant subjects, and in a few minutes they reached the house.

The house was a parallelogram in form, solidly built of stone, two stories in height, with narrow windows, a flat roof, and a low battlement along the edge of the roof.

The stone of which it was made was discolored by time, and the structure generally had an antique appearance with modern improvements.

Hark Sarpy explained to his guests that it had formerly been a Mission, the site being chosen for its safety against barbarian invasion.

Since the zealous and self-sacrificing Jesuits deserted it, it had come into his possession, and he had modernized it mainly by altering the interior, adding some windows and providing it with verandas at the front and rear.

The luxuriant growth of vines and other foliage about it and upon it robbed it to a considerable extent of the solid and severe appearance that it would otherwise have presented.

Hark Sarpy had hardly seated his guests on the porch of this pleasant residence when his daughter came out, bringing liquid refreshments.

This was not the mezcal or the pulque of Mexico, as might have been expected with such surroundings, but the whisky that takes its name from the county of Bourbon in the State of Kentucky.

While the young men tasted the liquor, and conversed with their host, they could not help noticing a change that had come over him.

Since he cautioned them against mentioning the subject of their Apache killing he seemed to have dismissed all that sort of thing from his mind.

He no longer appeared to be Hark the Hater. Crafty, secret and unrelenting in the pursuit of his savage prey, but a genial gentleman, proprietor of a fine estate, who treated honored guests with the greatest dignity and courtesy.

Hester Sarpy soon came out to call them to dinner, and they followed her into a cool dining-room with a stone floor and but little furniture, but where a large table was beautifully spread with an appetizing repast, the quality being excellent, though the variety was not great.

There were antelope steaks, yams and white potatoes, good bread and butter, coffee of delightful aroma, and a delicious piece of pastry.

It was evident that the young lady had an assistant in the culinary department, as her guests caught glimpses of a woman who appeared to be of Indian descent, though her garments were such as white women wore.

At the table they had a good chance to "take stock of" Hester Sarpy, and it must be admitted that they went to the limit of propriety in doing so, their glances wandering toward her a little too frequently.

She was well worth looking at.

Tall and well formed, with fine features and an expression that combined intelligence with force of character, she was a decided brunette, her hair being as black as her father's, and her dark eyes large and expressive.

Though her dress was a simple calico, it fitted her admirably, and the grace with which it was worn gave it an air of distinction.

While the young men paid due attention to the excellent meal before them, proving them-

selves the possessors of hearty appetites, they were deeply interested in their fair hostess, and none of her words or actions passed unnoticed.

When she expressed the hope that her father had come home to stay a while, they chorused their approval of that sentiment, doubtless wishing that while he stayed there they might remain as his guests.

In the course of the meal Jack Bunn happened to mention the fact that he had been driven from his telegraph station by the Apaches, and Hester Sarpy instantly became excited.

"Has there been another outbreak?" she demanded. "We so seldom hear any news up here that the whole world outside of us might go to pieces and we would know nothing about it. Why have you not told me of this, father?"

"It is not worth while to worry you with such matters," quickly answered Sarpy. "It is to be hoped that the trouble will soon blow over. Some Apaches have escaped from the reservations, but the soldiers are expected to capture them and take them back."

"In any event, father, we are safe here; are we not?"

"Yes, we are safe here."

When they had finished their dinner Hark Sarpy led his guests out on the plateau and showed them his estate, which they inspected pretty thoroughly.

The plateau was a spur of the mountain range, with the top leveled as smoothly as if it had been cut off with a knife.

On the eastern side was the cliff which they had ascended by the path in the side of the rock, and which seemed to be inaccessible except by that path.

The southern side was equally inaccessible, running down steeply to the pass which they had followed through the range.

On the northern side the plain ran back to the foot of a precipitous mountain, whose snow-covered summit was at times lost in the clouds, and it was certain that there was no entrance or exit in that direction.

The western side, however, was the most interesting of the boundaries of this estate, and there the young men lingered to gaze on the beautiful prospect that was spread out before them.

The cliff was quite as abrupt as that on the eastern side, but somewhat higher, and from its edge they looked down on a lovely valley, through which meandered a stream, a branch of the San Carlos, pretty full of water at that season.

This valley was covered with luxuriant grass and abundant blooms; but there was no sign of settlement or cultivation.

"It is strange that such a lovely spot is not inhabited," observed Stepney. "Are there no settlers about here, Mr. Sarpy?"

"There are ranches above and below; but it happens that I own this portion of the valley, and am not yet ready to use it."

The portion of the plateau north of the house, covering about three-fourths of its extent, was in cultivation, and there could be no doubt that it produced vegetable and other food products abundantly.

Through it in all directions, as well as through the grounds about the house, ran small ditches, by which the lava-rich soil was thoroughly irrigated and forced to unstinted production.

These little ditches were filled with water—a fact which was not at all strange at that time of the year; but the young men were at a loss to understand how the irrigation was kept up during the dry season, when it would mostly be needed.

Mark Stepney questioned their host on this point, and received a ready explanation.

"There is a lake up in the mountain yonder," said Hark Sarpy—"a small but deep lake, which is fed mainly by the melting snow. The Jesuits who started the Mission here discovered it, dammed up its outlet, and constructed these acequias to water the soil. I have improved upon their methods a little, but not much. We have plenty of irrigation in the driest part of the year, and a pipe under the ground brings water to the house that is generally ice-cold."

"You surely have everything here that reasonable people ought to ask for," suggested Mark.

"Yes, we have no cause to complain, though we do not have to depend entirely upon what we raise here. There is matter in these mountains that is more valuable than ice-water."

"Still, Mr. Sarpy, no person could ask a lovelier home than this."

"Since you have seen all of it, my friends, it will not surprise you to learn that my daughter has named it Bella Vista."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE APOSTLE OF PEACE.

As Hark Sarpy had informed his guests, there were ranches in the valley above and below Bella Vista, but they were few and far apart.

Above there was but one ranch, which was several miles away—in fact, near the head

of the valley, and which was quite a recent settlement.

The settlers were Robert Dunning and his family.

Mr. Dunning was a strong and hardy, middle-aged man, a typical pioneer, who had roughed it in many regions and in various ways, and who had brought to that valley from his struggles about the usual allowance of a rolling stone.

His family was composed of his wife, who had roughed it with him and had proved herself a woman of remarkable courage and endurance; his son Bob, a stalwart young fellow of twenty-four, and an adopted daughter known as Eva Dunning.

This girl had been rescued or captured from the Indians by Robert Dunning about a year previous to his last attempt at settling down, and had been given his family name, as she was not supposed to possess one of her own.

She was then believed to be about sixteen years of age, but was tall for her years and slightly built, though she was at the same time remarkably strong and agile.

In appearance she was dark haired and dark of complexion, with very bright eyes and a face that was really charming.

In character she was a mystery to her white friends and protectors, inasmuch as she really seemed to regret that she had been rescued.

They were compelled to believe that she had been well treated among the savages, as she moped and pined away for some time after she was taken from them, and as she still seemed to retain a longing for the wild life she had left.

Though she had learned to ride a horse like a Christian instead of vaulting on his back and scampering away man fashion, and though she had readily fallen into the ways of civilization, she sometimes had fits of moodiness and restlessness that made the Dunning family fear that she might run away and leave them.

At the time of her rescue she apparently knew but few words of English; but she picked up the language very easily, as if it were something that she had forgotten or laid aside for a while.

When her new friends were able to communicate with her, they learned that she had been betrothed in the Apache manner to a young warrior or chief named Carroh, and he seemed to occupy a considerable place in her thoughts, as she frequently murmured his name.

Stout young Bob Dunning, though by no means a handsome fellow to look upon, was naturally attracted to this half-wild damsel, and did his best to drive from her heart the memory of her savage lover; but it is certain that he had not succeeded in leaving there any vivid impression of himself.

Besides his immediate family, Mr. Dunning—who had usually been known by the honorary title of Captain Dunning—had two hired men employed to help him put up his buildings and open out the ranch.

These were both young men, also of the rolling stone order, and their names were Joe Buller and Ben Boggs.

It was the evening following a warm spring day—a day that had witnessed a good deal of work on the ranch—and Captain Dunning was seated at supper with his family and Buller and Boggs.

All were eating heartily, and at the same time congratulating each other upon the progress that had been made, when the sharp eyes of Eva noticed a horseman riding up the valley.

The house was opened to the air as much as possible, and she was so placed that she had the best view in that direction.

Arrivals were so infrequent that the stranger immediately became an object of interest, and all but Eva hastened to the most convenient points to get a look at him.

He was still so far away that nothing could be clearly made out concerning him, and they returned to their supper, which they had finished when he reached the ranch.

He proved to be a tall and lanky man, mounted on a horse that was as lean and bony as himself.

This uninteresting stranger was instantly recognized by the Dunning family, and the father and mother hastened out to meet him before he dismounted.

"Why, cousin Eph!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunning, "I'm mortal glad to see you. Whar on airth did you come from?"

"Light down, Mr. Cronkhite," said her husband, "and let me take keer o' your hoss."

The stranger, in fact, was Ephraim Cronkhite, the missionary from Michigan, who had made himself conspicuous at Pat Byrne's hostelry.

Eva Dunning had pouted at the sight of the new-comer, and Bob had turned up his nose contemptuously, while Joe Buller and Ben Boggs seemed to take no interest in him.

"Pap calls that thar bag o' bones a hoss," muttered Bob, in a gruff aside.

Ephraim Cronkhite was escorted into the house by his cousin, Mrs. Dunning, while her husband hitched the "bag o' bones" and called to Ben to come and take care of it.

"I've been down to the San Carlos Agency," said the missionary, "where I have tried to do some good; but I fear, Emily, that my efforts have been of no avail."

"Don't worry about that, dear soul. Come right in, and I'll clear a place fur you and set you some supper in two shakes of a sheep's tail."

The missionary saluted the rest of the family in a fatherly way, but was not greeted by them with any undue amount of affection.

Mrs. Dunning prepared his supper and set it before him with amazing celerity.

"Jest pitch right in and help yourself, Cousin Eph," was her hospitable command. "I make no doubt that you're nigh starved to death arter your long ride."

He surely ate as if he had been starved, and those who watched him as he rapidly stowed away large quantities of food, wondered what became of what he ate, as there was so little flesh on his bones.

He ate so voraciously, and made such a business of eating, that it was deemed the part of politeness not to interrupt him, and he was suffered to finish his meal in silence.

Captain Dunning, who had come in and was waiting for a chance to put in a word between mouthfuls, saw his opportunity when the guest finally leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Well, Mr. Cronkhite," he cheerily remarked, "what's the news with you?"

"I grieve to say that there is no good news," answered the missionary, with a groan. "Those unfortunate red-men who were confined at the San Carlos and White Mountain reservations have been treated with so little consideration, if not with such extreme brutality, that their free and noble natures have revolted against the load imposed upon them, and many of them have burst their bonds and wandered forth."

"What?" exclaimed Captain Dunning, as he jumped up. "Do you mean to say that those infernal Apaches have broke loose ag'in?"

"Ah, my friend, you must not be too hard on them. Remember their confinement, their privations, their sufferings. What could you expect?"

"That's so. It is about time for them to start on the war-path. After livin' in laziness on Uncle Sam's rations through the winter, they turn themselves loose in the spring to rob and murder the people who pay for their feed."

"I found the officers in charge of the Agency in a state of great excitement," continued Mr. Cronkhite. "They were preparing to send out armed men—indeed, some had already been sent out—to pursue the unfortunate Indians and compel them to return to the reservation, or even to slay them on sight. I endeavored to persuade them to abandon that cruel design and adopt a policy of peace and conciliation; but they would not listen to me. I grieve to say that they even cursed me, and threatened to kick me out of the Agency."

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunning. "They cursed a minister of the Gospill! Why, that's jest drefful!"

"Mebbe they felt kinder sore," suggested her husband. "Mebbe they 'lowed that they knowed thar business better'n any stranger from the States. Mebbe they'd had some experience, as we've had, of the murderin' ways of those rascally red-skins. Mebbe they thought it warn't no sort of a good thing to have that pack of hellhounds turned loose to butcher our women and children."

"That's so, Robert!" shouted the wife, "and it stands us in hand to look out fur ourselves. Our turn 'll come ag'in mighty sudden, if we don't stir our stumps and hunt a safe place. Gospill or no Gospill, we've got to git!"

"It's too blamed bad," said Captain Dunning. "Jest as we'd got things started here, we must skin out and run fur our lives. And you stand up fur those murderin' wolves, Eph Cronkhite! You want to make folks believe that they're treated bad and ought to be let alone! By the eternal gopher! I could e'ena'most cuss you, myself. But, Lord save us! you don't know no more about the business than a chicken with its head cut off!"

"I do stand up for them," stiffly replied the missionary. "I do insist that they have been badly treated. I do believe that the policy of peace and conciliation is the one thing that is required. As I am unable to induce the white men to agree with my views, I shall endeavor to impress them upon the red men, and I am now seeking some of the Apaches for the purpose of arguing the matter with them and bringing them to consent to an amicable arrangement."

"You lookin' fur 'Paches?" cried Captain Dunning, in utter amazement. "Heavens and airth! do you know what you're sayin', or have you gone clean crazy? You want to find some 'Pache! You had better git down and pray that none of 'em may ever find you! If they do, you'll never speak a good word fur 'em in this world. Wife, we will light out o' here 'arly in the mornin'."

CHAPTER XIV.

A HOT PURSUIT.

EARLY the next morning the Dunning tribe made preparations for their departure.

Those preparations were few and easily made, as it would be impossible for them to carry away anything but a little clothing and sufficient provisions to last them until they could reach a place of safety.

Captain Dunning grunted and growled over this enforced fitting, and occasionally broke out in such strong language as drew from Ephraim Cronkhite reproofs which the ranchman treated with utter scorn.

"This ain't no time fur puttin' a fine pint onto things," he remarked. "Your friends, the murderin' Apaches, may be comin' down on us at any minute, and then we won't have much more chance fur cussin', or fur prayin', either."

The blow came unexpectedly, although it was in a manner expected.

Joe Buller, who had gone up to the head of the valley to get his horse, came galloping back to the house, his voice and manner showing extreme excitement.

"The 'Paches are comin'!" was the stirring news he brought and delivered almost breathlessly.

"Afoot or hossback?" inquired Captain Dunning, who had been so long accustomed to that sort of thing that he was not easily excited.

"I dunno fur sart'in, Cap. I caught sight o' tha'r painted skins as they was sneakin' among the rocks and brush at the foot of the hills, yander, and I jest jumped on my hoss and skinned out."

"That's right. They'd ha' plugged you, sure, and we couldn't afford to lose you, Joe. Most likely they're afoot, as that's the way they generally move at the start, and we'll be able to keep out o' their way easy enough. Come, folks, mount and ride!"

No time was lost in obeying this order by any of them except Eva.

She had listened eagerly to Joe Buller's hasty report, and while the others were mounting she stood inactive, with her face turned toward the head of the valley.

Young Bob Dunning observed her apparent indecision, and frowned as he dismounted and strode to where she was standing.

"Come, Eva," he said, kindly, and then picked her up in his strong arms and seated her on her pony before she could think of resisting.

The girl gave him a glance that spoke her extreme displeasure, and sullenly suffered her horse to be led away with the others.

"The child knows those red people better than we do," observed the missionary, "and she believes that they are not such fearful wretches as their bitter enemies describe them."

This remark only provoked a grunt from Captain Dunning and a look of disgust from Bob, and the Apostle of Peace rode on quietly with the rest, though his backward glances showed that his heart was not entirely with them.

As the party rode away from the house the outlying Apaches began to show themselves.

They were doubtless of the opinion, as their intended victims were escaping, that further concealment was unnecessary.

Besides, they could no longer find any cover for their advance, except by making a circuit along the edge of the valley, which would take them considerably out of their course and give the white people a better chance to get away from them.

So they came out into the open and began to hasten down the valley in pursuit of the fugitives.

It could then be seen that they were "not to be sneezed at" as a hostile force, as they appeared in greater numbers than had been expected.

There were at least fifteen of them, and it could not be certainly said how many more there were, as there was a peculiarity about them.

The peculiarity was that four of them were mounted, and that the mounted men had taken up some of the dismounted ones to ride behind them, so that the full number could not easily be counted.

Their appearance at that point in such force was a surprise to the settlers, and its indication was that they despised the white people and expected to make a clean sweep of the valley.

"Reckon they're some of Mr. Cronkhite's friends from the reservation," grunted Captain Dunning. "They've been makin' a tower of the kentry, and a e comin' down here for scalps expectin' to have things thar own way, and it's a chance that they won't be disappointed."

There was, indeed, cause for apprehension.

The white people were mounted, but some of the Apaches were also mounted, though they had the disadvantage of riding double.

Captain Dunning had reason to know that their young bucks, who were doubtless then in capital condition, could run down a horse in a long race.

He knew, also, that the Apaches had secured such excellent weapons during their association with the white men, that they were very formidable opponents under any circumstances.

Consequently there was no use of trying to make a fight, and the settlers could only trust for safety to the speed of their horses.

In view of this important fact the leader hurried them forward, but not too rapidly, as he recognized the necessity of saving the horses.

His aim was to maintain the same distance between his party and the pursuers that appeared at the start, believing that at that rate the former would be able to hold out as well as the latter.

Somewhat to the surprise of a portion of the party, the Apaches kept right on down the valley, without ever stopping to plunder or molest the house or the ranch.

This afforded the Apostle of Peace a text for a homily.

"Just look at those red-men!" he exclaimed. "You call them robbers as well as murderers; but you have left your home at their mercy, and they show no disposition to touch anything that is yours. If they were the wretches you style them, your house would now be in flames."

"Not much," retorted Captain Dunning. "The 'Paches are nobody's fools, and they know that if they should fire the house the blaze and smoke would draw to 'em any soters or scouts that might be within miles o' here. They've got too much sense to run any sech resks fur nothin' but spite. Our scalps is what they're after, and you kin bet high that house-burnin' don't count with them alongside o' ha'r-raisin'."

"I am afraid, my friend, that you are prejudiced against the red-men."

"I'm prejudiced in favor of savin' my scalp and the lives of my family, and I know those red-skins' way down to the bottom. Hello! what sort of a break are they going to make now?"

It was evident that the Apaches had resolved upon a startling change in their tactics.

No longer content with a simple pursuit or stern chase, they proposed to harass the fugitives and to cripple them if possible.

The four mounted men dropped their human load, and started their horses forward at a rapid rate, at the same time spreading out so as to circle around the little band of white people.

Thus they would be able to concentrate their fire in the event of a fight, while that of their adversaries would be diffused.

The men on foot also hastened their steps, and came on as if with the intention of giving their advanced guard efficient support.

Captain Dunning perceived that the situation was getting serious; but he was experienced in Indian warfare, and could be depended on to do all that was possible to meet the emergency.

He hurried forward his party, directing the women to keep in front with Ephraim Cronkhite, while he and Bob, with Joe Buller and Ben Boggs, held the rear and watched the motions of the savages.

They had then reached a point a little above Bella Vista, and its tall cliff, crowned with trees, was plainly in sight a little distance to the eastward, though Hark Sarpy's house was not visible.

There would have been no indication of any settlement there, if it had not been that some people appeared at the edge of the cliff and began waving and beckoning to the white party in the valley.

Mrs. Dunning was the first to catch sight of them, and she hastened to make the fact known to her companions.

"Thar's folks atop o' the hill yander, and they're a-wavin' to us!"

Captain Dunning looked up and saw them, and he instantly changed his tactics, ordering his party to ride rapidly toward the cliff.

"Don't be too fast, Cap," entreated Ben Boggs. "How kin those folks help us? Thar ain't no way on airth fur us to git up thar."

"Never you mind, Ben," answered the leader. "They're white, anyhow, and will do all they kin to help us. If they didn't know that they could do suthin', they wouldn't be signalin' to us that way."

Yet there could be no question that there was a great risk to run.

By changing their course the party would give their pursuers a shorter route to reach them.

The Apaches caught sight of the people on the cliff as soon as the white party saw them, and pushed forward to overtake the fugitives before they could receive any sort of assistance.

Hardly had the party crossed the creek and begun to ascend the eastern slope of the valley, when the four horsemen in advance began to fire upon them.

Captain Dunning gave a quick order, dropped from his horse with his three men, and took a quick aim over his saddle.

As the four Apaches continued to come on, four rifles cracked, and one of the savages fell to the ground, while another was evidently wounded.

This had the effect of checking the advance.

Though no people are braver than the Apaches, they object to risking their lives uselessly, and decidedly prefer to have all the advantages on their own side.

The white men hastily remounted and galloped after their companions.

A new element of interest was added to the scene.

"Look thar!" shouted Mrs. Dunning. "They're fixin' a way fur us to git up."

Something in the shape of a straight limb suddenly veered out from a big tree at the edge of the cliff, and a machine was pushed over.

It proved to be a derrick, with a square platform fastened at each of its four corners, and attached to a rope, which was rapidly lowered down the side of the rock.

"Hurry up!" cried Captain Dunning. "Hooray! We'll soon be safe now!"

Then there was another sudden change of scene.

One of the mounted Apaches was an active young warrior, gayly caparisoned and wearing a showy plume, who was always in advance of his comrades.

It might have been noticed—though it doubtless was not—that Eva Dunning had cast frequent backward glances at him, and she had gradually lagged behind her companions at the front until she was overtaken by the rear guard.

"Hurry up, Eva!" ordered Captain Dunning. "What's the matter with you?"

As the young Apache dashed across the creek, he uttered a shrill and peculiar cry.

Eva threw up her head, turned her pony with a sudden jerk of the bridle, and galloped down the slope at headlong speed.

There was no stopping her, and she soon joined the plumed warrior, who rode forward to meet her.

"Sakes alive!" cried Mrs. Dunning. "Eva has gone back to the Injuns!"

"Why should she not?" demanded Ephraim Cronkhite. "She has lived among them, and she knows that they are not wicked. I shall follow her that I may preach to the poor red-men the gospel of peace on earth and good-will among men."

Before he could be prevented, the Apostle of Peace kicked his heels against the sides of his horse, and dashed away at a rate of speed of which the bag-o'-bones would not have been believed to be capable.

"Stop him!" shouted Mrs. Dunning.

"No use," answered her husband. "If the Lord is merciful to fools, as I've heard tell, Eph Cronkhite will be a good subject to work on."

CHAPTER XV.

TO THE RESCUE.

MARK STEPNEY and Jack Bunn declared that they were more than charmed with Bella Vista, and that it well deserved its name.

They were yet more delighted when the daughter of the host came from the house and joined them in their walk about the grounds.

She showed them her flowers and a fountain, and a clear little pond with a graveled bottom, where fish came at her call to get the food she brought them.

There was evidently no sort of mystery about the place, and yet the curiosity of the guests was not satisfied.

"Who is it," Mark asked his host, "that takes such good care of these grounds? And who looks after your daughter and defends her during your absence? There must be a great deal of work to do on the place; but I have seen but one here besides yourself."

"There are others," answered Hark Sarpy. "You have seen Barney Driscoll, who is a good and useful man, and here comes another. This is Shawnee Jim, as we call him; but he is so thoroughly civilized, that I want to change his name to Jim Shaw. The woman you saw helping my daughter about the house is his wife, and she answers to the name of Kate Shaw."

There was no mistaking the Indian origin of the person who approached, as it was plainly disclosed in his bronze complexion, his high cheek bones, and his long, straight hair; but he was dressed in the apparel of the white people, and his language and manners scarcely differed from theirs.

He was tall and as straight as an arrow, and he saluted the strangers with grace and dignity when he was presented to them.

Shawnee Jim, Hark Sarpy explained to the young men, was his trusted lieutenant. He was a descendant of the once great and powerful Shawnee tribe, whose few and scattered remnants, despising the Indians of the West and Southwest, had allied themselves with the whites, and had been good and useful friends of the conquering race.

"And here is Manuel!" exclaimed Hester Sarpy, as a man of quite different appearance came shambling up to the group.

He was short and stout, and in his features and general style was as unmistakably Mexican as the other was Indian.

He wore the short jacket and calzoneros and broad sombrero peculiar to Mexico, trimmed with an abundance of silver buttons and tawdry braid.

He was, moreover, intensely ugly, and his natural ugliness was increased by the fact that both his ears and a portion of his nose were missing.

Manuel ducked his short and burly figure at his introduction to the strangers, remarked in passable English that the odor of Apaches was in the air, and expressed the hope that there might be a chance to "rub out some of the skunks."

Hark Sarpy explained that about a year ago, with the aid of a couple of friends, he had rescued the Mexican from a party of mountain Apaches,

who were taking delight in torturing him, preparatory to putting him out of the world.

"They were having quite a picnic over friend Manuel," continued the host, "and if we had not stepped in just as we did, there would soon have not been enough of him left to swear by."

It appeared that the savages had murdered the Mexican's wife and child; that after his rescue he had attached himself to Hark Sarpy, and that he was chiefly distinguished by his devotion to "Miss Hettie" and his intense hatred of Apaches.

Both of these men carried rifles which they seemed never to lay aside, and they had come to consult with their chief concerning the relief of Barney Driscoll from the duty of guarding the pass.

Shawnee Jim was directed to take the Irishman's place, and the host and hostess, as night was then coming on, retired with their guests to the house.

An excellent supper followed, and afterward the men sat out on the broad porch and enjoyed their smoke in the balmy night air, with the further blessing of the presence of Hettie Sarpy.

That was special blessing to one of them, at least.

It was soon evident to the most careless observer, not only that Mark Stepney admired the young lady, but that there was a mutual attraction between them.

In fact, they had not been seated out there an hour when they monopolized each other, and Jack Bunn was left to the society of his host and Barney Driscoll and Manuel.

Hark Sarpy doubtless noticed these indications, but did not consider them objectionable, as he commended both of his guests to the consideration of his daughter.

"I have only known my young friends for a little while," said he; "but in that short time I have learned to like them and believe in them. A man who has served with Major Powell, as Mr. Stepney has, is sure to be the right sort, and I can certify to Mr. Bunn as a man who has brains and knows how to use them."

Before the young men went to sleep that night they warmly declared to each other that the longer Hark Sarpy should choose to remain at Bella Vista and keep them there, the better they would be pleased.

After breakfast the next morning there was again a general sallying forth.

Hark Sarpy had many matters to attend to about the place, and when he went to look after them he was accompanied by his guests and his daughter.

After a while, quite in a natural way, and as if they had not the faintest intention of purposely separating themselves from the rest, Mark Stepney and Hettie Sarpy strayed away and wandered about as it pleased them.

They strayed to the Western side of the plateau, as the young lady declared that she could never get enough of the view that was to be enjoyed from that elevation.

As they stood there together, gazing down into the valley, or at the rugged and lofty hills beyond, Hettie suddenly pointed downward and northward.

"Look!" she eagerly exclaimed. "There are some people coming this way!"

Mark looked and saw them plainly.

He counted seven persons on horseback, and had no doubt that they were white people.

"There are some more!" cried Hettie again. "There are others coming down the valley after them. Are they white people, too?"

A brief inspection convinced her companion that the others were not white people.

"Those are Indians," he said. "They must be Apaches in pursuit of the white people."

"May the good Lord have mercy on them! My father must know of this at once."

Like a startled fawn she ran over the plateau, calling her father at the top of her voice.

She did not need to go far to find him, and Hark Sarpy came in a hurry to the edge of the cliff, accompanied by Jack Bunn and followed by Shawnee Jim and Barney Driscoll, Manuel being on guard at the pass.

"Hettie tells me that you have seen Apaches below there," he said, as he reached Stepney.

Mark pointed to the two parties in the valley, where the fact that they were fugitives and pursuers was becoming every moment more apparent.

A glance told Hark the Hater the truth, and he was instantly all excitement and action.

"It is a fact!" he exclaimed. "Those are white settlers pursued by Apaches; and they will surely be overtaken and murdered unless we can help them. But we can help them. We must and will help them."

"What can we do?" demanded Mark.

"You will soon see. If they have sense enough to know help when they see it, we can help them. Barney, get two horses and gear for the derrick, and be quick about it! Hettie, dear, run to the house and get my field glass, with my rifle and cartridges! Go with her, Mr. Bunn, and bring your rifle and your friend's! All may be needed. You may stay right here, Mr. Stepney. Try to attract the attention of the people down there, and beckon to them to come this way."

CHAPTER XVI.

PULLED OUT OF PERIL.

HARK SARPY's orders were immediately and implicitly obeyed, Barney Driscoll hurrying in one direction, while Hettie and Jack Bunn ran off in another.

He was not a bit idle himself, but hastened with Manuel to a big tree at a little distance, just at the edge of the cliff, where he busied himself with some ropes.

Having finished his work there for the present, he and Manuel joined Stepney in waving and beckoning to the people below.

"They see us!" he joyfully cried after a little of this exercise, which was then renewed with fresh vigor.

"Yes, they see us for sure, and have sense enough to understand that help is intended. They have changed their course, and are coming toward us."

"How can we get down there to help them, or how can they get up here to us?" demanded Mark. "Why should they believe that they can get help from us?"

"Because they see that we are white, and they know that we would not hold out false hopes to them, and they trust us. There is Barney with the horses. Come with me now, and I will show you how we can help them."

Stepney accompanied his host and Manuel, who had also joined them, to the big tree, reaching it just as Barney came up with two horses on a keen run.

Attached to the tree was a beam that was lowered to a horizontal position by a stout chain.

Through the end of the beam a rope ran over a pulley, and was fastened to a broad, square platform, which was then resting on the ground.

The other end of the rope passed around a drum at the foot of the tree, and terminated in a hook that could be attached to the gear of the horse-team.

Mark Stepney needed no explanation of this arrangement, and all turned their attention to the approaching party of white people.

The scene in the valley had become more exciting since the fugitives changed their course.

The Apaches, fully aware of the presence of white people on the cliff, had hastened the pursuit, as if hoping to cut off their victims before they could receive any succor.

Their foremost horsemen were getting perilously near the fugitives, when four men of the latter halted and delivered a fire that did some damage and checked the advance.

Then the four men mounted and rode after their companions, who were rapidly approaching the cliff.

"Those folks are no fools, and I don't think we will have any trouble about saving them," said Hark Sarpy.

Jack Bunn and Hettie came up almost breathless, their steps having been hastened by the sound of the firing.

Hark Sarpy took his rifle and his field-glass, and Mark and his friends prepared for action.

The platform had been pushed over the edge of the cliff by Barney and Manuel, who were lowering it in the sight of the fugitives.

It had been known for some time that there were two women in the party of white people, and it was then evident that one of them was a matron and the other a young girl—points which highly interested and excited Hettie Sarpy.

The sight of the platform as it was being lowered undoubtedly had an exhilarating effect upon the fugitives, as they waved their hands to their friends on the cliff, and pressed forward with renewed energy.

The four men in the rear were closing up to their companions, and Hark Sarpy was watching the party narrowly through his field-glass.

His gaze was more particularly directed at the girl, who had fallen behind the foremost of the party.

"That girl cannot be an Indian," he said, "though she is nearly dark enough to pass for one. No, she is surely white. Heavens and earth! what does that mean?"

The girl had suddenly turned her horse, and, deserting her companions, was galloping like mad toward the Apaches.

A sudden cry of surprise and dismay burst from the lips of every person on the cliff.

She was evidently too good a rider to allow the supposition that the horse had run away with her, and her strange action was apparently due to design.

This fact was made certain when she continued her flight until she joined a young Apache who rode forward to meet her.

The meeting was evidently a friendly one, if not affectionate, and she rode with her savage companion across the creek to the other side of the valley.

Before the group on the cliff had recovered from their astonishment at this remarkable occurrence, another surprise was sprung on them.

The tall man on the bony horse halted with the rest when they stopped and gazed at the girl.

Then he suddenly broke away from his companions, and cantered after her down the slope.

This double escapade was too much for those who watched the performance from the edge of the cliff.

They could not begin to understand it.

That two white persons, and one of them a girl, should desert their own people and rush into the arms of the cruellest of all enemies, was utterly incomprehensible.

Hark Sarpy was the only one who made an effort to solve the problem.

"That girl must be an Indian," he said. "It can't be explained in any other way. Yet, I could almost have sworn that she was white, and there was something in her face that drew me to her."

"Supposing her to be an Indian," observed Mark, "how would you account for the queer action of the man, who is undoubtedly white?"

"Why, didn't you know him, Stepney? If you had looked through my glass, you would have recognized him as the man we met at Paddy Byrne's—the missionary from Michigan—the friend of the poor red-man—Mr. Crankeye, as poor Pat called him."

"Has he been crazy enough to go to the Apaches of his own accord?"

"That seems to be about the size of it. He has found his friends, and will soon learn what sweet and tender creatures they are. We can only hope that they will give the poor devil an easy death."

By this time the white people below, perceiving that the seceders were beyond their control or recall, were hastening toward the cliff, and were rapidly approaching the platform, which had nearly reached the ground.

The Apaches were evidently more surprised by the arrival of Ephraim Cronkhite among them than by that of the girl, and it appeared to upset them for the moment.

But they speedily recovered from their astonishment, and he was taken in charge by a couple of bucks and led to the rear.

Then the savages, seeing their prey about to escape from them, started forward as if they had resolved upon a grand coup and meant to do all the damage they might before the fugitives could ascend the cliff.

Hark Sarpy leaned over the edge and shouted to those below:

"Turn your horses loose and jump on the platform! We can haul you all up together."

There was nothing else to be done, and the chance must be seized at once.

Though the settlers must have been greatly grieved at parting with their four-footed friends, it was a question of their own lives, and they could not hesitate.

Dismounting as soon as they reached the foot of this cliff, they gave each horse a cut that sent him galloping down the valley, and hastened to get on the platform.

It was pretty well crowded by the five of them; but those who were watching from above could see that the woman was placed on the side next the cliff, while the men handled their rifles and faced their foes as well as they could.

It was necessary that they should do so, as the enraged Apaches were coming up the slope at a rapid rate, and were then nearly within rifle range.

"Haul up!" shouted Hark Sarpy as soon as the platform was loaded, and Barney instantly started the horses, which had been standing hitched to the derrick rope.

It was a pretty hard pull; but the machine had been fitted for heavy loads, and Barney and Manuel both took hold of the rope and helped the horses, so that the platform came up quite rapidly.

The mounted men of the Apaches rode on at their best speed, and the warriors on foot hurried forward.

They soon began to fire at the ascending load of human freight; but the rifles of the four men on the platform cracked and kept cracking.

At the same time Hark Sarpy and his two guests joined the music, and the firing became brisk, while the people on the platform were rapidly becoming less available as a mark.

The Apaches had already suffered from the fire of the white people, and were not disposed to face it recklessly.

Brave as they were, they were strongly in favor of having the biggest chances on their own side, while in this case the advantage of position was with their foes.

Perhaps they might have been spurred up to greater temerity, if it had not been for the fire from the top of the cliff, but the people up there could pick them off at their ease, and run no danger of being hit in return.

A few of the foremost Apaches dismounted and threw themselves on the ground, as if hoping to get better chances by crawling forward; but the plunging fire from above made them so uncomfortable that they abandoned the effort.

Thus the savages kept at such a distance that, though there was a great deal of firing, nobody was hurt, with the exception of a very slight wound that Ben Boggs received at the opening of the engagement.

In a little while the platform safely reached the top of the cliff, and was swung in and low-

ered to the ground, where the settlers stepped off, overjoyed at their escape from a peril which they fully appreciated.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHO WAS EVA DUNNING?

THE fugitives were warmly welcomed by the people of Bella Vista, and as warmly expressed their gratitude for their rescue.

Mrs. Dunning was immediately taken possession of by Hester Sarpy, who found her vacillating between joy at her escape and grief at the loss of Eva.

Few explanations were made at that time, as the men were all occupied in intently watching the movements of the baffled savages.

The first movement of the Apaches was to pursue and recover the abandoned horses, at which Captain Dunning grunted and growled.

Then they moved down the valley in a body, at a safe distance from the rifles on the cliff.

As they went, it could be seen that the girl was apparently free and allowed to do as she pleased, while Ephraim Cronkhite was dismounted, bound, and otherwise treated as a prisoner.

The Apaches did not go far, but halted within half a mile of Bella Vista, as if they meant to camp there.

Leaving Barney and Manuel to watch them, Hark Sarpy led the way to the house, followed and accompanied by Hettie and all his guests.

"This is a mortal fine place," said Captain Dunning as he walked along. "If I'd ha' knowed it was here, I reckon I'd ha' tried to strike it afore now. Air you the owner of it, mister?"

"I am the owner," answered Hark, "and my name is Hark Sarpy."

"Shol! You don't say! Then you must be Hark, the Hater, the man who has laid out more of those cussed 'Paches—"

"Hush!" whispered Hark, as he pressed the settler's arm and pointed at Hettie. "We don't need to tell all we know, and I hope that my daughter there has never heard of Hark, the Hater."

"All right, Cap! I'll be mum as a mouse and put a muil on the boys. But you've done a mortal good work, all the same, and this last job of yours is one that I and my folks will be everlastin' thankful fur. Jerusalem crickets! is that your house?"

When they reached the house, Hettie was on hospitable thoughts intent, and hastened to help Shawnee Kate prepare a dinner for the large party.

Mrs. Dunning, after she had examined Ben Roggs's hurt and discovered that it was hardly worth noticing, followed her young hostess into the kitchen, where she insisted on rolling up her sleeves and bearing a hand in the household labor.

She did bear a hand, and proved to be so useful, that Hettie was allowed to do nothing but "stand around" and direct her companions.

Hark Sarpy seated his guests on the veranda, and brought out some American whisky and Taos brandy, which they found quite acceptable after the labor and excitement of the morning.

Having learned who the new arrivals were, where they had come from, and the particulars of their flight from their home in the valley, he led up the conversation to the events that had occurred just previous to their rescue.

"We mought ha' got away safe if it hadn't been fur your help," remarked Captain Dunning, "and then ag'in we moughtn't. On the whole I'm inclined to believe that the red scamps would ha' got our scalps, which they was achin' fur terrible bad."

"As it was," suggested Sarpy, "you lost two of your party."

"Yes; but that warn't no fault of ours, as they scooted off o' thar own free will, and one of 'em the Injuns was friendly to, and t'other may chance to pass fur a crazy man. So I've got hopes that they may both be safe."

"I have met that man before," said Hark, "and my two young friends here were with me when I met him. It was at a lone liquor shop on the other side of the range, and he talked about the poor red-men and their wrongs in a way that made us suspect that his head was queer."

"Wal, I can't say as he's crazy, though it does look that way sometimes. That man is my wife's cousin, Eph Cronkhite—Cranky, as I call him—and he is smart enough in some things, money matters, frinstance; but he's clean gone in respect o' the red-skins. Eph means well, Mr. Sarpy; but he don't know."

"And he won't believe what is told him by people who do know," observed Jack Bunn.

"That's a fact; but he's likely to find out something fur sart'in now—dead sart'in, as I may say. I don't want any livin' white man to be worried by the red scamps, but I have sometimes thought that I could stand the loss of Eph Cranky, if he should turn up missin'."

"You say that the Apaches were friendly to the girl who ran away from you," remarked Sarpy, "and they surely seemed to be. I looked at her closely, and took her to be a white girl;

but I suppose, from the friendship of the Indians, that she must have been an Apache."

"Not she!" emphatically replied Captain Dunning.

"Half-breed, then?"

"No half-breed, neither. I've been among 'em enough to know the reds and the half-breeds when I see 'em, and I'm mortal sure that thar's not a drop of Injun blood in that gal's body."

"Who is she, and where did she come from?"

"That's more'n I kin say; but I know whar she came from last. I stole her from a band of 'Paches on the north side of the Mogollon Range. She didn't want to go with me; but I took her home to my old woman, and we grewed to be mighty fond of her, and it hurts me mighty bad, Mr. Sarpy, to think that my Eva is gone."

"Eva!" exclaimed Hark, with suppressed excitement. "Is her name Eva?"

"Eva is her name, and we called her Eva Dunning, fur want of any other handle."

"You gave her the name of Dunning, then. Did you also give her the name of Eva?"

"No. She fetched that with her. She only knowed a few words of white folk's talk when I got her, though she picked it up right fast with us; but she knowed her name, and she said 'twas Eva. It don't seem as if the Injuns could ha' give her that name."

Hark Sarpy was then visibly excited, and he bent forward, speaking in a low tone, but very earnestly.

"Of course they did not give it to her," said he. "She was stolen from the whites so long ago that she has lost the recollection of everything but her name, and she must have been a mere child when she was stolen. How old is she now?"

"She don't know nothin' about her age, of course. I call her sixteen, and the old woman puts her at seventeen. I reckon she mought be somewhere between sixteen and seventeen."

"Mr. Dunning," said Hark Sarpy, speaking yet lower and more earnestly, "ten years ago my wife and her babe were murdered by Apaches, who carried off my little girl. She was then a child of six years of age, and would now be a little over sixteen. Her name was Eva."

"Marciful Heavens!" exclaimed Captain Dunning, and a strong current of sensation ran through the group on the veranda.

"She had black hair and eyes and a dark skin," continued Sarpy. "When I looked through my glass at that girl to-day, I seemed to bring up the image of my lost child. As sure as there is a God above us, I believe that the girl you rescued from the Apaches, and who left you this morning, is the daughter that was stolen from me."

Captain Dunning was so overcome by this announcement, that it was some minutes before he recovered from his astonishment.

Then he made a remark that was calculated to lighten the interest of the scene.

"If that's the case, Mr. Sarpy, I reckon the truth kin be shown, and you won't have to go far to git at it."

"How so?" eagerly inquired Hark.

"When I took her away from the 'Paches she had a little gold chain around her neck; but it was gittin' too small for her, and the old woman took it off and kept it fur her. I reckon she's got it with her now. Wait till I fetch Em'ly."

Captain Dunning found his way into the kitchen, and soon reappeared with his wife, whose sleeves were still rolled up, and who was not pleased at being disturbed in her work.

He whispered in her ear a few words that opened her eyes wide, and made her cheeks flush and turn pale.

"Is it Eva's chain you want?" said she.

"Yes, I've got it right here."

From some mysterious recess in the bosom of her dress she brought out an old leather wallet, and took from it a small gold chain, which she handed to Hark Sarpy.

He devoured it with his eyes as he held it in his trembling hands, and seemed about to burst into tears.

"She is my child!" he hoarsely cried. "This was my Eva's chain. I remember it well, and remember when I first clasped it around her neck. See! here are the initials of her name, E. S. God help me!"

His head dropped upon his breast, and his hand shook as he clutched the precious relic.

"Eva is Mr. Sarpy's daughter," whispered Captain Dunning to his wife.

"Sakes alive! And now she's gone back to the 'Paches!"

"One favor!" said Hark Sarpy, suddenly rousing himself. "I must ask you all to do me one great favor. My daughter in there must know nothing of this. If she should learn that her sister is alive; that she has been rescued from the Apaches, and has gone back to them, and that she is now so near us, the effect upon her would be terrible. You must all promise me that you will not breathe a word of this matter in her hearing, or give any hint by which she might guess at it."

The promise was solemnly given by all.

"Dear me!" moaned Mrs. Dunning. "This has gi'n me sech a turn that I don't know how

I'm goin' to git over it. I'm glad that dinner's ready, and you men folks may come in as soon as you want to."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BELLA VISTA INVADED.

DINNER came as a relief to all, with the possible exception of Hark Sarpy.

Even he seemed to brighten up as he ministered to his guests at the table, though there was a cloud upon his brow and a weight upon his mind which he could not shake off.

Hettie was also somewhat gloomy and occupied with her own thoughts, and when she was asked the reason of her silence she confessed that she was thinking of the girl who had gone back to the Indians!

"She was a white girl, father," said Hettie. "Mrs. Dunning is sure of that, and her name is Eva. My little sister's name was Eva, too. How strange it is that she went back to the Indians!"

"Very strange and very sad," replied Hark Sarpy, who was quite willing to drop the subject.

He renewed it after dinner with Captain Dunning and his two young friends, whom he took out into the grounds for the purpose of a private consultation.

Captain Dunning told how Eva had seemed not to have been weaned from the Apaches, as was shown by her occasional fits of restlessness and moodiness.

He said that when he stole her from the red-skin band she was dressed in the highest style of Indian gorgeousness, and had evidently been well treated and made much of among them.

That fact was further evidenced by the story she told of her betrothal to a young chief named Carroh.

He was doubtless the Indian rider who had called to her as she was approaching the cliff, and she had recognized the call and gone to him.

These were sad and serious details to Hark Sarpy; but through the darkness he thought he saw a little ray of light.

It was possible that in going back to the Apaches Eva had obeyed a sudden impulse of which she might afterward repent, and in that event her recovery would not be hopeless.

Whatever the case might be, every effort must be made for her recovery, and the only question was of the best course to adopt.

As the force of Apaches then in the neighborhood of Bella Vista was clearly too large to be openly attacked, Hark Sarpy proposed to take a few good men and hang upon their rear when they went away, picking them off until he could procure sufficient assistance to overcome them.

Captain Dunning, who was nearly as anxious about the girl as her father was, at once volunteered to make one of the party, and Mark Steppney and Jack Bunn entreated that they might be counted in.

For the carrying out of this plan it was necessary that the movements of the Apaches should be closely watched, and sentinels were posted in addition to those who had been already detailed for that purpose.

It was learned that the Indians had camped but for a short time in the valley within sight of Bella Vista.

They had then, as it was supposed, gone aside into the hills, but were believed not to have left the vicinity.

Two or more of them were discovered, in the course of the afternoon, sneaking up the pass that led across the range, and they were fired upon, but without effect, unless the firing may have deterred the main body from taking that course.

When the day was ended it was decided that all the people at Bella Vista, with the exception of Manuel, who was to guard the path up the eastern cliff, should go to bed and get a good night's rest.

In the morning, as Hark Sarpy proposed, he and Captain Dunning would go on a scout to ascertain what had become of the enemy.

In the morning, however, there was a most unexpected and surprising change in the situation.

Just at daybreak, as the inmates of the house were beginning to stir, they were startled by the sound of a rifle-shot, apparently coming from the eastern side of the plateau.

As soon as possible all the men were out of their rooms and on the veranda, most of them with their weapons in their hands.

Hark Sarpy was the first to get outside; but he was not as quick as Shawnee Jin, who had slept outside, and was at once ready for action.

It was supposed that Manuel, discovering some sneaking Apache in the pass below, had fired at him.

Nobody thought that the shot could mean anything more serious than this, as it was believed that no enemies could succeed in getting access to the plateau.

Thus it was curiosity, rather than a sense of danger, that brought out the inmates of the house in such a hurry.

But they soon learned that the alarm was a more serious business than they had supposed it to be.

Two other shots shortly followed the first, and then came a third.

The third shot was much nearer to the house than the first had been, and the two others were further away.

Shawnee Jim "sized them up" without any difficulty.

"Manuel fired the first shot and the last," said he—"not the others."

"The Apaches have found us out!" Hark Sarpy. "Come with me, Captain Dunning! You and Jim will be enough. Let the rest stay here."

The three scouts hastened down the graveled path toward the cut in the cliffs, and soon came in sight of Manuel, who was running toward them.

It was evident that he had been driven from his post; but how, and by whom?

The latter part of the question was speedily answered by the sight of the bronze figures of several Apaches, who were also hurrying toward the house in pursuit of the Mexican.

As they chased him they fired at him occasionally, but Manuel was too fleet of foot and too well acquainted with the grounds to give them any advantage over him.

He ran mostly among the trees and shrubbery, which partly concealed him from his pursuers and gave him cover.

When his three friends came near enough to cover his retreat, the crack of their rifles compelled the Apaches to pause and advance more cautiously.

Then the four white men retreated to the house in good order and not too hurriedly.

"What is it, Manuel?" inquired Sarpy.

"Carrajo! Ze dam 'Pache."

Further inquiry elicited the information that Manuel, hearing some suspicious sounds to the northward of his position, had stepped out in that direction to listen and had discovered some Indians stealing along the edge of the cliff.

Perceiving that he had been outflanked and was in danger of being taken in the rear, he had fired upon them and hastened to get out of their way.

The Indians had probably climbed the cliff where the plateau joined the mountain, and had nearly come upon him unawares.

"That is our one weak point," said Sarpy; "but I would never have believed that it would be found out."

Soon they reached the house, where all were eager to learn the nature and extent of the danger that threatened them.

"Inside, all of you!" ordered the proprietor of Bella Vista. "Come, boys, we must make haste to put up the storm doors and shutters and prepare for hard times."

Shawnee Jim and Manuel and Barney, with their chief, sprung to this work, in which Mark Stepney and Jack Bunn joined them as soon as they understood it, and Mrs. Dunning and Shawnee Kate also gave efficient aid.

Captain Dunning and his son, with Joe Buller and Ben Boggs, stood on guard with their rifles, to await the approach of the Apaches and give them a warm welcome if they should come in sight.

The storm doors and shutters, as Hark Sarpy styled them, were stout frames of heavy plank, fitted to the doors and windows on the inside, and with loopholes cut in them for observation and firing.

It would appear that the proprietor of Bella Vista, though he deemed his position so secure, had made preparations to meet just such an emergency as had occurred.

He explained that he had provided these fixtures several years previously, when the Apaches were more formidable than they had since become.

The defenses were soon completed, and Hark Sarpy called together the leading men of the party for a consultation.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WHITE SPY.

THERE was not a madder person at Bella Vista than Manuel.

That the Apaches, whom he hated collectively and individually with the fiercest and most implacable hatred, should have succeeded in reaching the plateau and taking possession of it while he was on guard, stirred his temper until he could not contain himself.

He poured forth a profusion of the toughest Mexican oaths, mainly directed at the Apaches, but some of them reflecting on himself.

"Never mind, Manuel," said his chief. "It was no fault of yours, and nobody could be expected to do better than you have done. We are thankful that you are alive and with us. If you had slept on your post you would have been dead before now, and we would have had little chance for our lives."

In this opinion the others concurred, and the enraged Mexican gradually grew calmer.

"It was my fault if anybody's," continued Sarpy. "I knew that at the northern end of the plateau on that side it was possible for a man to climb up, but I supposed that it was a secret, known only to myself and one other man—that man must have betrayed it."

However that might be, it was certain that

the Apaches were on the plateau, and that the then unguarded cut in the cliff was open to them.

Though the band that had pursued the settlers in the valley outnumbered the whites then at Bella Vista, it was believed that they would not have ventured to seek their enemies in their stronghold unless they had been reinforced.

They might have hoped to gain an important advantage by a surprise; but it was reasonable to suppose that their numbers had been increased.

This supposition became a certainty as the day advanced, and the outlying Apaches were observed from the windows and roof of the house.

After they came in sight of the house they moved forward slowly and carefully, and evidently waited for the rest of their force to come up.

It was not possible to make more than a guess at their numbers, as part of them were concealed from view, and the others were continually moving about; but it was certain that a considerable addition had been made to the band, and Sarpy was of the opinion that more Apaches had come through the pass from the other side of the range.

If so, the new-comers had witnessed the scene of the slaughter caused by Jack Bunn's dynamite, and might be supposed to be intent on avenging the death of their comrades.

Having settled upon the fact that Bella Vista must stand a siege, Hark Sarpy declared that he had no apprehensions on that score.

The stout walls of the store-house would surely protect the inmates, and there were provisions enough to last for weeks, together with a good supply of ammunition.

"They will gnaw a file when they tackle Bella Vista," observed the leader; "but they will be able to pick up a little plunder outside, and I suppose the first thing they will go for will be our horses."

This supposition was soon proved to be correct.

The stable was in sight of the house and within fair rifle-shot, so that it would be a dangerous task to go in at the door; but the savages knew how to get what they wanted without exposing themselves.

They approached the stable from the far side, keeping it between them and the house, then made an opening in the rear, led the horses out of range under cover of the building, and took them around to the cut on the eastern side of the plateau, whence they were doubtless conveyed to a hiding-place below.

The white men mourned audibly, and some of them swore terribly, as they witnessed the abduction of their four-footed friends; but they could do nothing to prevent it.

A sally would have been ruinous to them, and the wily savages kept well out of their reach.

"We are all afoot now," sadly observed Hark Sarpy; "but I shall be much mistaken if we don't get some of our horses back before we are through with those Apaches."

Before noon the proprietor of the Bella Vista made an important discovery.

He was on the roof with Shawnee Jim and Captain Dunning, observing the movements of the scattered savages, when an exclamation from Shawnee Jim attracted the attention of his companions.

"White man thar," said the Shawnee.

The others looked as he pointed, and saw a man in civilized garb, supposably a white man, who had come forward among the savages.

He was clearly not a prisoner, but was walking about at his pleasure, surveying the house and its grounds from a safe distance.

"It can't be Eph Cranky," remarked Captain Dunning. "No, he ain't tall and thin enough fur that. What in the name of wonder is a white man doin' thar, anyhow?"

Hark Sarpy looked through his field-glass, and was at no loss to answer the question.

"I can tell you what that white man is doing there," said he, "because I know who he is."

"You know him? Let me squint through that machine o' yours. Mebbe I know him, too."

Captain Dunning looked through the glass, but was still puzzled.

"I ort to know that man," said he. "Sart'in I've seen him afore. But I can't place him, somehow."

"I last saw him only a little while ago," said Sarpy. "It was at the lone liquor shop on the other side of the range, where I met Mr. Cronkhite. He has been for many years an Indian trader and a spy for the Apaches, and his name is Zeke Stebbins."

"That's the chap!" exclaimed Captain Dunning, slapping his leg by way of emphasis. "He is all you say, and wuss; but I thought he had gone out of that line of business."

"It don't look like it. Shortly after I met him the other day, I stopped at that liquor shop with my two young friends down below, and found the proprietor dead and scalped on the floor, with three Apaches lying around, dead drunk. Of course there was something more

than a drunk the matter with those Apaches before I left them. I found evidence there which proved that Zeke Stebbins had been with the Indians and had probably brought them there."

"And now he's here with 'em, and—look!—durned if he ain't bossin' the red-skins and cuttin' out thar work fur 'em!"

"That is just what he is doing, and I have no doubt that there is not a gun or a cartridge among them that he has not furnished to them. There is another point about that man, Captain Dunning—a point that concerns me personally."

"What p'int is that?"

"You heard me say that the secret of the pass—if it can be called a pass—by which the Apaches sneaked up and surprised us, was known only to me and one other man. That man was Zeke Stebbins, who first told me of this place and put me on the track to get possession of it. He has made it known to the Apaches, who have long been thirsting for the blood of Hark, the Hater, and they have naturally made a strong push to strike me where I live. Now that they are here they will accomplish their purpose if possible, and at least will do me all the damage they can, and Zeke Stebbins will be glad to help them."

"That's what we may calculate on, I reckon; but what kin they do?"

"I don't see that they can do any great harm. They won't be able to starve us out. Perhaps they may try to cut off the water, but the house supply runs under ground, and they can't find it. It is not what they may be able to do to us that worries me, but what we may be unable to do to them. Since they are here in such a force, and since they have deprived us of our horses, the prospect of recovering my daughter has become dark indeed. But I'll make them suffer before this moon runs out, or they will dance over Hark Sarpy's scalp."

"They may make some kind of a push to-night; but they won't be likely to try to do anything afore dark sets in."

"That is true, and it is to-night that we must watch them and be ready for them."

CHAPTER XX.

THE ATTACK BY FIRE.

THE only event of interest that occurred during the afternoon was a movement that had been foreseen by Hark Sarpy.

The Apaches, apparently directed by Zeke Stebbins, were discovered working at the foot of the mountain with tools which they had picked up about the grounds, and the results of their labor were soon apparent.

Hettie's favorite fountain stopped playing, and water gradually ceased to run in the little irrigating ditches about the house.

The proprietor of Bella Vista smiled bitterly as he noted these points.

It was evident that the savages had turned the main ditch so that the water ran over the cliff into the valley.

"Much good may that do them!" said he.

They will have their labor for their pains, if they fancy that they have cut off our water. Fortunately the supply for the house comes through a concealed line of pipe of which that miserable renegade knows nothing."

Investigation proved this statement to be perfectly correct, as the water ran freely into the house, and there was enough of it for all possible purposes.

The Apaches were making themselves quite at home on the plateau, and were unquestionably monarchs of all they surveyed except the stone house, which was proof against their bullets, and which they feared to approach closely.

Though they were regularly encamped on the open portion of the plain, and a pretty fair view could be had of them with the aid of the field-glass, the closest scrutiny failed to discover any other white person than Zeke Stebbins.

It was presumed that they had a smaller camp somewhere below, in which were kept Ephraim Cronkhite and the girl who was known as Eva Dunning.

"If we could only slip away from here and leave them in the lurch," said Hark Sarpy, "so that we could pounce on their camp and capture the horses and my child, they would be welcome to do as they pleased with Bella Vista."

But there was no way to give their enemies the slip, and they could only await the unfolding of the chapters of time and chance.

The Apaches were good waiters, too, and were not at all disposed to attempt an attack that must inevitably result in the slaughter of many of them.

In the stone house, as they well knew, were many white scalps which they longed to secure, and especially that of Hark, the Hater, who had sent so many of their sort out of the world, but Apache lives were quite as valuable to themselves as those of their enemies, and they were inclined to be careful of their own scalps.

They were not idle, however, but kept up during the afternoon a kind of tentative fight in a skirmishing way.

Several of them, scattered around the house, and availing themselves of the cover of the trees, would approach the building as near as

they dared, and fire at the loopholes in the doors and windows.

This style of warfare seldom elicited any reply, as Hark Sarpy had instructed the defenders of Bella Vista to be careful of their ammunition and not to fire unless they saw a good chance for an effective shot, and such chances were quite infrequent.

As night increased, caution prevailed within the stone house, and to every white man was assigned his post of observation and defense.

This caution was the more necessary as the night proved to be so dark that objects at the distance of more than a hundred yards could be but dimly discerned.

Yet it became evident, as the night deepened and darkened, that the Apaches were preparing for some important movement.

Hark Sarpy and Shawnee Jim, both of whom seemed to be able to see in the darkness nearly as well as in the daylight, declared that the savages were busy in and about the stable, and a few shots were sent in that direction, but without seriously annoying them.

In the house few lights were allowed, and those were burned low and under cover, so that the loopholes should not be illuminated, as in the event of an attack the enemy would be sure to aim at the lighted apertures.

After closely watching the proceedings outside for a while, Sarpy gave a significant order.

He directed that the largest vessels in the house should be filled with water and placed near the window on the second floor, that was directly over the front door.

Then it was understood that the enemy meant to make an attempt to fire the house.

Of course the stone walls were safe against any such attempt; but the veranda was of wood, and if that could be burned, together with the front door, and perhaps a window or so, the Apaches might be able to profit by their numerical advantage.

This undertaking was begun by a scattered but simultaneous advance on all sides of the house, but especially at the front, which was marked by such rapid and continuous firing as showed that the enemy were not afraid of wasting cartridges.

Indeed, the bullets rattled against the heavy shutters at such a rate that it was not safe to stand at the loopholes.

The next movement was peculiar, and, as Hark Sarpy said, was probably planned and directed by Zeke Stebbins.

A large quantity of hay had been brought out from the stable, and tied and compressed with ropes that were found there, until it took the form of a cumbersome but not unwieldy ball.

This big ball was carefully navigated to the open space in front of the house, when it was rolled forward by probably three or four savages, who were of course concealed and protected by its bulk.

As it approached the house, the white men sought to shoot down those tumblebugs of a new style, and did fire a few shots, but without any appreciable effect, as the ball kept advancing toward the front door.

How the tumblebugs were to get away after firing the mass was not apparent, unless they expected to escape under cover of the excitement and confusion caused by the conflagration.

But Hark Sarpy was determined that there should be no excitement, and he had men stationed at the water receptacles to extinguish the flames, as well as those who were to fire on the sneaking foe.

So the ball of hay was rolled to the house, and, by a vigorous boost, was bounced up on the veranda against the front door.

That effort was fatal to one of the boosters, who was stretched lifeless by a bullet from the rifle of Manuel, who was posted at the edge of the roof.

Fire was at once applied to the hay by the crouching Apaches, and immediately the flames and smoke began to rise.

Hark Sarpy allowed the fire to get a good start, as the light would be useful to his marksmen.

They used it to good purpose.

The enterprising Apaches who had brought hay to the house started to run as soon as they had set fire to it, darting and leaping about as they ran, in the hope of escaping the bullets of their adversaries.

In this hope they were grievously disappointed.

There were two of them left, as it proved, and they were both shot down before they had got a dozen yards from the house.

This was not the only hope of the savage foe that was doomed to disappointment.

Hardly had the runners dropped in their tracks, when the attempted conflagration came to a sudden end.

The portion of the veranda roof over the front door jutted out from just above the second story window, leaving a clear space between that window and the burning hay.

Quickly the heavy shutter was taken down, and all the vessels of water that had been prepared for the purpose were emptied out, speedily extinguishing the flames.

As soon as this work had been thoroughly done, the shutter was replaced, and the white men congratulated themselves upon having so easily defeated the supreme effort of their enemies.

The Apaches were far from being so well pleased.

When the hay ceased to blaze, they set up a howl of rage and disappointment, and spitefully sent a shower of bullets at the house, by which nobody was hurt.

When they perceived that their three comrades did not return to them, they doubtless realized the fact that their grand attempt had resulted in a disastrous failure.

It must have increased their chagrin to know that the people in the house had an abundant supply of water, though they had worked so hard to deprive them of that useful element.

At all events, they were so far discouraged, that they made no further attempt upon the house that night, and its defenders, dividing themselves into watches, rested peacefully until morning.

CHAPTER XXI. A SKILLFUL SCOUT.

NOTHING of interest occurred during the morning of the next day, and the white people had such an easy time that they were induced to believe that their enemies would abandon the siege.

The Apaches kept themselves well out of range, and were evidently at a loss to decide what they should do, holding several consultations which seemed to result in nothing.

Although Bella Vista was so high and out of the way, that nothing that went on there would be likely to be discovered by any passers-by in the valley or elsewhere, yet the country was raised by the outbreak, and the Apaches on the plateau knew that they would be better off with their friends in the Southern Mountains.

Shortly after noon something happened that greatly excited the defender of Bella Vista, though its effect upon the besiegers could only be imagined.

The sound of a bugle was what aroused Hark Sarpy and his friends, and it evidently came, faint but clear, from the valley at the foot of the cliff.

There was no question that it was a military bugle, and that it uttered a military call, making it clear that a body of cavalry was passing through the valley.

"Thou art so near, and yet so far!" was the quotation that sprung involuntarily to the lips of more than one of the party.

It was intensely aggravating to know that friends—powerful and plentiful friends—were at such a little distance from the besieged house, and yet its inmates were unable to communicate with them or convey to them any sort of information of their condition.

Of course it would not do to let the soldiers go by without making an effort to attract their attention, and three shots in succession were fired from the house.

The Apaches kept remarkably quiet, as they also had heard the cavalry bugle and knew what it meant.

Naturally they were unwilling to make their presence on the plateau known to their enemies in the valley.

From the top of the house scouts could be seen cautiously approaching the edge of the cliff and peering over to watch the movements of the troops.

The white men wished that they could do the same; but the house was so surrounded that it would have been worse than useless to make the attempt.

As the bugle sounded again, it was thought that the soldiers had been attracted by the shots, but it was not to be supposed that their meaning had been understood.

More shots were fired, and an effort of another sort was made as soon as possible.

A large iron vessel was carried up on the roof, and a fire was built in it, and when the blaze was fairly started, some rubbish was thrown on to make a smoke.

Though this proceeding was doubtless highly objectionable to the Apaches, they were unable to prevent it.

Again and again the cavalry bugle sounded, making it plain that the troops were considering the situation and trying to find out what was the matter; but Hark Sarpy declared that he expected no assistance from that quarter.

"The house," he said, "is quite out of sight from any portion of the valley, and the soldiers have no reason to suppose that there is any sort of a habitation up here. Besides, if they knew our fix, they would be unable to get up here unless we could communicate with them and tell them the way. Even then a couple of men at the cut could keep off a regiment."

These apprehensions proved to be only too well founded.

The soldiers halted in the valley nearly two hours, during which time the bugle was sounded occasionally, and more shots were fired from the house, and the smoke was kept up; but nothing came of the efforts.

At last it appeared that the men in blue had

concluded to treat the affair as a conundrum and give it up.

The bugle sounded the advance, and its last notes were so faint and far that there could be no doubt of the departure of the soldiers.

If any further proof was needed it was furnished by the Apache scouts, who returned from the edge of the cliff to the main body.

When night came, Manuel had a proposition to offer.

Although a daring one, it was practical and was received with favor.

He proposed that he should take a coil of light but strong rope, slip through the Apache cordon around the house, and reach the cliff at the southern end of the plateau.

Then he would make his line fast, let himself down to the pass where it descended toward the valley, find the Apache camp, steal a horse there, and ride away to seek assistance from the military.

This project was quite feasible, as it would be no difficult matter for one man to pass the Apache line in the darkness; but there were two objections to it, neither of which was very strong.

One was that Manuel might not be able to find the lower camp at night.

Another was that, if he should find it, his hatred of the Apaches was so intense that he might be tempted to try to wipe out a few of them, and thus make a botch of his mission.

Hark Sarpy cautioned him on the latter point, and the Mexican promised that he would refrain from any attempt at Apache slaughter, and would content himself with taking a horse.

"If you get help," said the leader—"that is, when you get help, bring them right here. If the Apaches are gone, we will be gone; but you will know how to pick up the trail and follow it."

Manuel slipped out at the back way, and disappeared in the darkness.

As no shot was heard, and no commotion was perceptible among the Apaches, it was supposed at the house that he had succeeded in getting through safely.

That was just what he had done.

His experience among the savages and with Hark Sarpy had taught him how to creep and crawl, and he made his way as silently as a snake through the trees and shrubbery, passing near the dark form of an Apache who was seated against a tree half-asleep, but without disturbing him in the least.

Thus he reached the southern end of the plateau, where the cliff was not as high as on the western side, and prepared for his descent.

Making an end of his rope fast to a tree, he protected it with a bunch of grass where it passed over the edge, so that it should not be liable to be cut by the rock.

Then he strapped his rifle upon his back and let himself down.

As the cliff at that point was not a sheer perpendicular, he was obliged to use his feet as well as his hands, with the additional danger that the rope might be frayed by jutting points of rock; but he reached the bottom safely, and when he was once in the pass he knew just what to do.

The only possible difficulty at that stage of the game would be the chance meeting with some Apache in the pass, and if that should happen he was determined that it would be bad for the Apache.

He met no living creature as he descended the pass to its entrance at the valley, where he set his wits at work to discover the location of the lower Apache camp, as it was quite certain that they had one down there.

Manuel prided himself upon the ability of his nose, in spite of the fact that it had been curtailed of its fair proportions.

It was perhaps true, as he often asserted, that he could smell Apaches if they were anywhere in his vicinity, and he was quite sure that he could smell smoke at a considerable distance, unless the wind took it away from him.

The savages must be supposed to have had a fire at their camp, if it was not then burning, and his organ of smell soon discovered the presence of smoke in the air.

He followed his nose down the valley until he came to an opening in the hills at the left, which he entered.

Then his sense of sight came into play, as he perceived the light of a small fire a short distance up the little glen.

He went forward boldly until he was near enough to observe the camp by the firelight and take note of its occupants.

There were three Apaches apparently sleeping there, and a fourth keeping guard.

Besides these there were a white man bound and sitting up, and a female who was probably asleep.

The situation was a difficult one, as it was evident that the horses were further up the glen, and that he would be obliged to pass the camp to reach them.

This was a small matter, compared with what might come after it; and the Mexican found no special difficulty in flanking the camp, as he was as quiet as a cat, and the light of the fire deep-

ened the darkness about him, at least to the eyes of the solitary sentry.

When he reached the horses, he discovered that there was also a sentry there; but the Apache who was performing that duty had probably gone to sleep on his post, as he was seated motionless against a tree.

Manuel was obliged to make sure of the sentry's condition, and was doubtless glad that a necessity had arisen which compelled him to disregard the instructions of his chief.

If the Apache was awake, he must be put to sleep; if he was asleep, he must never be allowed to wake; or there would never be any doing anything with the horses.

Manuel drew his keen knife, and moved as silently as a serpent could crawl, among the rocks and bushes, without displacing a stone or stirring a stick, until he was just behind the tree which he wished to reach.

The deep and regular breathing of the delinquent sentry spoke of sound sleep, and the Mexican proceeded to use his opportunity and make sure of his prey.

Stealing around the tree, and bringing himself close to the half-naked body of the savage, he struck a swift and certain blow.

There was not even a groan, scarcely a gasp, as the sleeping Apache fell over, never to awake in this world.

Then came the most difficult part of the game, and Manuel recognized the toughness of the remainder of his task.

How should he get by the Apache camp with a horse?

The safest plan would be to stampede the whole "cavayard," and dash through his foes in the midst of them.

This scheme would probably be attended with loss of life and limb among the Apaches; but it might also be the death of his chief's daughter, to say nothing of the white man.

He was obliged to choose a quieter but more risky plan.

Picking out what seemed to him to be the best horse of the lot—in fact, it was Hark Sarpy's favorite that had been taken from his stable at Bella Vista—he bridled and saddled it, finding plenty of accouterments near at hand.

He then guided the animal down the glen, going as near as possible to the southern limit, and walking on the "nigh" side so that he might mount at any moment, while he allowed the horse to slouch along as if it had got loose and was wandering away.

Of course such a maneuver was bound to be discovered as soon as he came within range of the firelight.

The sentry at the camp, perceiving the horse, began to walk toward him, and would soon espy his two-legged companion.

That was at once Manuel's peril and his opportunity.

Vaulting into the saddle, with his cocked revolver in his right hand, he fired one point blank and effective shot at the approaching Apache, and dug his Mexican spurs into the horse's flanks.

As the affrighted steed dashed by the camp at a headlong gait, the sleeping Apaches started up, seized their weapons, and began to fire with hasty aim at the man and the horse.

The man was bent down upon the neck of the horse, to present as small a mark as possible, and he had noted as he came up the most open and easy way of exit.

Almost instinctively he guided the horse, without slackening speed for an instant.

In a few seconds he was safe in the cover of the darkness, and in a few minutes he emerged from the glen into the valley.

Giving no further thought to the foes behind him, and satisfied with the havoc he had made among them, he rode away in the direction which the cavalry had taken in the afternoon, hoping to pick up their trail in the morning, if he should not overtake them in their camp.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN INFERNAL MACHINE.

As it was believed to be certain that Manuel had got away safely, there was nothing for the defenders of Bella Vista to do but divide themselves into watches, as they had done the night before, and wait patiently for the developments which the next day might bring.

Hark Sarpy, however, was restless and not disposed to wait, patiently or otherwise.

The Apaches had not succeeded in doing himself and his friends any special damage; but at the same time they had not suffered any harm in comparison with what he would be glad to inflict upon them.

He wanted to exterminate his enemies before they could get out of his reach, and the more he thought of it the more excited he became.

It seemed that the remembrance of the dynamite destruction in the pass was still weighing on his mind, and that he wanted some more of the same sort.

"I have a little dynamite stowed away down in the cellar," he said to Jack Bunn. "I have a mine not far from here, and have been using

the stuff for blasting. Perhaps we might bring it into play now."

"I don't see how anything could be done in that line," answered Jack. "Even if we could get the stuff located out there among them, I have not enough wire to begin to reach it."

"When we were at your telegraph station you spoke of leaving your apparatus there and arranging your dynamite cartridge so that it would explode if the Apaches should come in."

"Yes, I might have done that there, but not here. Even if I could manage the machine, how could we put it where we want it?"

"I'll be bound that Shawnee Jim will undertake that contract."

"I don't see how the scheme could be made to work. But, if anybody is anxious to risk his life in that way, perhaps something else might be done. If we had, for instance, a tin case long enough to hold one of your mining cartridges, and not too large—"

"I've got it!"

The proprietor of Bella Vista brought out a tin cylinder, closed at one end and with a lid at the other, which had been used for the safe keeping of maps.

As Jack declared it to be the very thing for the purpose, he descended to the cellar and brought up a dynamite cartridge and part of a coil of fuse.

The dynamite cartridge was set in the tin case and surrounded and covered with fine rifle powder.

Through a hole that had been punched in the lid a length of fuse was thrust down into the powder.

Then the lid was closed and fastened, and the fuse was cut off pretty short.

"There's the machine," said Jack. "All it needs now is for Shawnee Jim, or some other durned fool who don't care whether he lives or dies, to get within easy reach of the Apaches, light the fuse, and throw it among them."

"That is just the idea," observed Sarpy, "and it is such a good scheme that I won't trust it to Shawnee Jim."

"What do you mean?"

"That I will do the job, myself."

"You, Mr. Sarpy?"

"I, of course. I would never ask any man to do for me what I was not willing to do for myself, and I think I can manage the matter better than Jim could."

"I wish," said Jack, "that I had had nothing to do with the infernal machine."

"Have no fear for me, my young friend. No man living can sneak and crawl nearer to that red-skin camp than I can, and no man stands a better chance to get away safe. All I ask is that the machine shall work to suit me, and I do believe it will."

Sarpy requested Jack to say nothing about his purpose until he was out of the way, and the young man, perceiving that he was bound to attempt the daring scheme, promised to be silent.

"How Manuel would ache for this job if he knew of it!" said Hark, the Hater.

Jack Bunn remarked that it might be doubted if the Mexican could crave a chance to exterminate Apaches more eagerly than his chief did.

Hark Sarpy concealed the tin case under his coat, and let himself out at the front door, merely remarking to Captain Dunning as he passed him that he was going to scout around the house a little.

Not until he had disappeared in the darkness did Jack Bunn explain to the others the nature of his errand, and then they promptly stationed themselves at the best positions for covering his retreat in case he should be pursued.

Instead of going directly toward the camp of the Apaches, which was just out of rifle range at the north of the house, the scout turned off in a westerly course, doubtless supposing that he would thus more easily slip through the cordon of sentries about the premises.

He did encounter a solitary Apache, but had no difficulty in evading him under cover of the darkness.

Having then, as he presumed, passed the line, he changed his course, and headed direct for the Apache camp.

There was still a little fire burning there, and its faint light guided him through the darkness of the night and the abundant foliage.

The camp was a little way from the edge of the cleared space, and as he approached it he concealed himself behind the trees and advanced cautiously until there were no more trees to cover him.

Then he dropped to the ground and wormed himself over it until he was near enough to throw his missile.

He half raised himself and looked at them.

They were all lying down, apparently asleep, with the exception of the two sentries.

He took the tin case from under his coat, and touched a lighted match to the fuse, which instantly fizzed and sparkled.

Slight as the light and noise were, they attracted the attention of one of the sentries, who uttered a cry that aroused the others.

Those Apaches were as quick as lightning and their rifles were in their hands when they arose.

As soon as the fuse was lighted, the scout

jumped up, and, with a vigorous effort and a sure aim, threw the infernal machine into the midst of them.

As he did so, one of the sentries fired, and a bullet whistled by his ear.

He had not stopped for the hint, but had turned and run for the cover of the trees as soon as he had thrown the missile.

He was perhaps a hundred yards away when the gunpowder and dynamite exploded together with a great noise and commotion, and the ground trembled under him as if an earthquake was passing.

The scout had expected to be pursued, and in this he was not disappointed.

Astonishment and curiosity were naturally the first emotions that stirred the breasts of the savages as the tin case tumbled among them, hissing and sputtering, but their curiosity was not strong enough to induce them to examine it, nor had they any time to spare for any such research.

There could be no doubt that it was some diabolical invention of the enemy.

Consequently their first impulse was to get away from it, and the second was to pursue the enemy.

The explosion might be expected to cripple them and disturb their faculties; but the pursuit was well begun before the explosion occurred.

Hark Sarpy knew the way to the house, and made a bee-line in that direction.

He knew that the trees and the darkness would shield him from the bullets of his pursuers; he believed himself to be as fleet of foot as any of them, and he saw nothing to interfere with his escape except a chance meeting with one of their cordon of sentries.

That was just what occurred!

An Apache, startled by the explosion, was running toward the camp as Hark Sarpy was running from it, and both were going at such headlong speed in the darkness that they came violently into collision, and both fell to the ground.

The scout's impetus was the strongest, and he fell on top of the Apache.

Even as he fell, and half-stunned as he was, he drew his knife, and the next second, almost by instinct, he plunged it into the breast of his enemy.

The blow was death, but not quick enough to prevent the shrill cry that burst from the lips of the stricken savage.

Recognizing his danger, Sarpy staggered to his feet, and strained every nerve in a final effort to escape his pursuers, who were then close upon his heels.

He was seen, and shot after shot was fired at him, but only with the effect of quickening his pace and giving notice to his friends of his flight and pursuit.

When he reached the open space in front of the house, he put forth his utmost effort, dashed across to the veranda, and threw himself behind the bunch of hay which was still there, just as the bullets of his pursuers began to rattle around him.

At the same time his friends in the house, describing the dark forms of the Apaches as they burst through the trees, opened upon them a rapid fire, before which they retreated hastily.

The door was opened, and Hark Sarpy entered the house, where he was warmly congratulated upon the success of his dangerous mission and his escape.

During the remainder of the night the Apaches were silent, and the next morning no sign of their presence was visible from the roof.

After waiting and watching for a while, the defenders of Bella Vista sallied forth and discovered, to their great joy, that their enemies had abandoned the siege and evacuated the plateau.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EVA'S SUDDEN IMPULSE.

HARK SARPY was right in his conjecture that a sudden impulse caused Eva to desert her white friends and rush back to the Apaches.

She was young yet, quite as much of a girl as a woman, and the greater part of her life had been passed among the savages, and her childish remembrances had faded, and her association with the Dunning family had not been sufficient to overcome the effects of long habit and usage in an entirely different existence.

As far as she knew she was an Apache.

She had nothing but the assertions of the Dunnings to convince her to the contrary, and she had been taught that all white people were liars.

Doubtless she believed, at least for the moment, that when she went back to the Indians she was going to her own people—that she belonged to them and ought to be with them.

It is possible, too, that her recognition of the young chief, Carroh, and the sound of his familiar call, may have had much to do with the sudden impulse that compelled her escapade.

If he had ever been dear to her, it is certain that Bob Dunning had not succeeded in effacing his image.

If he was dear to her, then, it must be admitted that she took no pains to display her affection.

The Dunnings had been very kind to her after their fashion, and she well knew that the raid upon the ranch and the subsequent pursuit meant nothing less than a relentless hunt for their scalps, and she naturally wished their lives to be spared.

Therefore her first word to Carroh after she met him was an entreaty that the pursuit should be stopped and the white people allowed to go free.

This was utterly preposterous.

In Apachedom a woman's wish always counted for little, if anything.

In a band that was on the keen hunt for scalps it counted as worse than nothing. It was an impertinence—it deserved to be treated only with contempt.

With the prey in sight such a request was simply amazing to the young chief, and he laughed in the face of the girl who made it.

"You do not know what you are saying," was his contemptuous reply. "Have the white people made a fool of you?"

He turned away from her, called to his comrades, and rode off in pursuit of the hated whites.

She also turned away, and let her horse wander about as it pleased, scarcely replying to the welcoming words of the warriors whom she met and who knew her so well.

She had obeyed her impulse—had returned to her people, had at once been snubbed and laughed at, even by her lover.

Bob Dunning, rough and uncomely as he was, would never have treated her so.

Her slightest wish was always a command to him, and he had delighted in doing her bidding, no matter what the consequences might be.

Very likely she then reflected upon the superiority of the white people and their ways—regretted that she had left them, and would have been glad to return to them.

If so, the way was no longer open.

Between them and her was a barrier of Indian warriors which she could not pass, and the white people were ascending the cliff by means of a remarkable machine, and the two sides were firing upon each other, and her lot was again cast in with the Apaches.

It must have afforded her some satisfaction to perceive that her white friends were safely out of reach of their pursuers, who sadly abandoned, at least for a time, the hunt for scalps.

When they made a temporary camp further down the valley, Eva went with them as a matter of course; but she had not recovered her good humor, as the remembrance of her severe snubbing rankled in her breast.

The warriors came about her to congratulate her on her escape—that was the way they looked at her desertion of her white friends—and to persuade her to tell her story since she was taken from them; but she was not inclined to be communicative, and gave it to them in as few words as possible.

Carroh, who had made no account of the rebuff he had given her, considering it only a matter of course and exactly the right thing to do, came about her with the rest, and was inclined to be talkative and lover-like; but she treated him very coldly, scarcely answering any of his talk.

He attempted some familiarity with her; but this was so displeasing to Eva that she suddenly started up and slapped him in the face.

It was a slap that sounded through the camp and made his painted cheek smart.

There could hardly be a greater insult to the young chief than this—to be struck by a squaw, and in the presence of his fellow warriors.

The laughter of his comrades emphasized and heightened the insult, which he might otherwise have easily forgiven, and made necessary some sort of punishment.

As Eva was not yet his wife, it would not be acting a manly part to whip her, and he did the next best thing.

He tied her hands behind her back, and made her sit down at a little distance from the others.

After they had eaten, and while the pipe was being passed around, the warriors held a sort of a council to consider the case of the young woman—not because of evident sullenness and insubordination, but because she was a woman and in the way.

They were on the war-path just then, and also expected to have some difficulty in joining their brethren in the south, and they did not want to be bothered with any such baggage.

Part of their women and children were on the reservation, others in the hills at the north, and others in the fastnesses of the mountains at the south, and the only place to which Eva could be taken was their destination on the other side of the lower Gila.

So there was no help for it, and it was agreed that she should go with them, and Carroh promised to be responsible for her safe-keeping and good behavior.

Scouts that were sent into the mountain pass at the eastward to inspect the stronghold of the whites at Bella Vista reported that there was no

visible way of getting at it; but before dusk they reported some better news.

The news was that a strong party of Apaches was coming through the pass from the other side of the range, and with them was their white friend, Zeke Stebbins.

Communications were opened between the two parties, and it was learned that Zeke Stebbins possessed the key to the stronghold of the whites at Bella Vista, knowing a means of secretly and safely reaching the plateau.

As he happened to have at that time a grudge of his own against Hark Sarpy, he gladly made known the secret of the approach to his Apache friends, who were above all things eager to secure the scalp of the hater.

It was decided that an attempt should be made to take the white people by surprise, and that attempt might have succeeded, if it had not been for the vigilance of Manuel and his timely warning.

Before the movement upon the plateau was begun, a small camp was established in a secluded glen, and a few Apaches were left there in charge of the horses that had been acquired by the party, together with Eva and Ephraim Cronkhite.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE APOSTLE AND THE APACHES.

It is possible that by this time the Apostle of Peace had also regretted the sudden impulse that caused him to put himself in the power of the Apaches.

His reception among them had been by no means flattering—not at all such as he might have believed to be due to the dignity of his mission, and the righteousness of the cause he represented.

The Apaches were not surprised at the return of Eva to their ranks.

They knew her, and she knew them, and they were glad that she came to them of her own accord.

But when they saw that tall white man, mounted on a bony horse, riding toward them and gesturing with both hands, while he spoke in a loud voice words which they did not understand, they did not know what to make of it, and expressed their amazement by grunts and stares.

To them this performance simply meant that a white man's scalp had come to them, unhunted and uncalled for, but none the less welcome.

"Let us have peace!" he shouted as he rode down the slope. "Refrain, my red brethren, from pursuing those white people! Leave them to the punishment of their own consciences! I am the Apostle of Peace, and I entreat you to hear me, for your own sakes and for the sakes of your wives and children!"

He might as well have addressed the Apaches in Greek.

The riders who were pressing the pursuit allowed him to pass them without question, as he could not escape, and might be attended to at any time.

It was not until he had crossed the creek, and reached those who were on foot, that he began to experience rough usage.

A stalwart Apache seized his horse by the bridle, pulled him from the saddle, throwing him violently upon the ground, mounted the horse, and hurried away to join his comrades in the advance.

This performance was painful as well as humiliating, and the missionary from Michigan grieved inwardly and groaned audibly.

His mortification must have been increased by the fact that the horse which had borne the Apostle of Peace on his mission of mercy was seized as a war-steed, and hurried off on an errand of blood.

He was picked up and dragged to the rear, where a few savages were sadly watching the safe arrival of the white people at the top of the cliff, and the return of their discomfited comrades.

When they had all gathered near the little stream, and the fact was apparent that they had lost more than they had gained by the morning's work, they were wrathful enough to give their solitary prisoner a hard time.

Though he was not allowed to rise, and the position in which he was seated was unfavorable to oratory, he proceeded to harangue them on the blessings of peace, telling them how he sympathized with them in their misfortunes, how he blamed the rapacious white man for the wrongs that had been inflicted upon them, and that he had trusted himself among them for the purpose of benefiting them mentally and morally and physically.

He might as well have talked to the trees and the stones.

Some of the Apaches understood a few words of English—generally the worst words—but none of them could begin to comprehend the wasted eloquence of Ephraim Cronkhite.

It is more than likely, considering the fact that he spoke forcibly and with many gestures, that they supposed him to be abusing and denouncing them as a set of thieves and murderers.

At all events, they knew what to do with him,

without puzzling over his own opinions, and they proceeded to give him a foretaste of the tender mercies he might expect among them.

When they brought his horse to him, he imagined that they had been affected by his eloquence, and were about to return that skeleton of a steed to him with their humble apologies; but they speedily got that idea out of his head.

They mounted him on his horse; but the manner of the mounting was not such as he had been accustomed to, nor was it at all pleasing to him.

He was mounted with his face to the rear of the animal, and that was not the worst of it.

The Apaches had a pleasant way of their own of making a prisoner secure, and they demonstrated it to the entire satisfaction of this one.

His legs were passed around the horse's neck and tied at the ankles, and his body was bent down until he lay with his chin touching the animal's backbone, and then his arms were tied by the wrists under the belly of the bony beast.

As the horse had a very sharp and evident backbone, this position not only rendered it impossible for the prisoner to escape, but was very wearisome and uncomfortable.

As the architectural steed started off with him, occasionally kicked or punched by the savages, the jolting motion made his case much worse, and he may well have felt sorry for himself as a martyr in the sacred cause of peace.

Fortunately for the victim, the journey at that time was of short duration.

The Apaches encamped at a little distance down the valley, and the missionary from Michigan was dismounted and seated on the ground.

Again he had an opportunity for airing his eloquence, and hastened to avail himself of it, though he was hampered by the impossibility of gesticulating, his hands being tied behind his back.

His oratory was unheeded, and the truth finally dawned upon him that it was not understood.

Deeply as he sympathized with the savages, his knowledge of them, as may be supposed, was theoretical rather than practical, and he had not previously seen enough of them to appreciate the fact that the language he spoke was not known to them.

When he had got this point fixed in his mind, it was natural for him to believe that he could get along with them better if he could have the aid of an interpreter.

If he could make them understand why he was there and how kindly were his intentions toward them, they surely would treat him with consideration, and he might be enabled to do much good among them.

When the council concerning Eva had come to a conclusion, and its result was announced to her, Ephraim Cronkhite called the girl and requested her to act as his interpreter in a speech which he desired to make to the Indians.

She was slightly acquainted with him, having met him twice at Captain Dunning's ranch, and the acquaintance had not prepossessed her in his favor; but he was a friend of the white people who had tried to be good to her, and she could not refuse his request, though she knew pretty well what his talk would amount to, and could judge how it would be received.

It happened that the Apaches were curious to know more about that very peculiar white man, and they gathered about him and the girl when he again began his oration.

He substantially went over what he had previously said, with the exception that his recent rough treatment had shown him the necessity of dwelling more emphatically upon his sympathy with the savages and the good results which he hoped to secure for them.

Eva translated this oration after a fashion of her own.

She did not understand all that the missionary said, but caught the drift of his remarks, and gave it to the Apaches in a condensed shape, omitting much of the diffuse and high-flown language which he used to explain his meaning.

The Apaches, seated in a sort of semicircle, listened with a fair degree of patience, but with evident incredulity.

When the white man had finished his talk, the leader of the band arose and delivered his answer through the interpreter.

He said in effect that the talk was plausible, but it deceived nobody. The white man was lying, like all other men of his color. They had heard such talk before, and its only effect had been to delude the red-men into giving up their lives and liberty and property for empty promises that were never kept. The Apaches there present had no idea of surrendering their arms and ponies for the sake of a peace that meant nothing short of slavery. They did not believe a word the white man said, and it would be useless for him to weary his tongue with more talk.

He did persist in talking, in spite of this rebuff.

He loudly protested his honesty and his innocence of any evil intention; but he was not listened to.

One of the leading elements of the Apache

creed had never been understood by him, and it was hard for him to understand it.

That element was their deep-rooted disbelief in the ability or inclination of white men to speak the truth.

The Psalmist said in his wrath that all men were liars, and the Apaches did not differ from him much.

They said in their wrath that all white men were liars, and they stuck to it.

Perceiving that he was utterly disbelieved, the Apostle of Peace subsided into a state of silence and melancholy.

He might then and there have been subjected to some more rough treatment, if Eva had not gone beyond her duties as interpreter and volunteered a little speech in his behalf.

It was brief and to the point.

As she more than once put her finger to her head with a significant gesture, it was easy to infer that she was representing the white man as an insane person.

This view found more or less favor among the Apaches.

It was not difficult to persuade them that any white man who would deliberately, and of his own accord, put himself in their power, to say nothing of the absurd sentiments he had expressed, must be somewhat shaky in the upper story.

They so far agreed with what Eva said to them, that they visited no more of their wrath upon the missionary at that time.

He was allowed to sit or stand around in peace and comfort, and when the little camp was established in the glen, he was taken there with Eva.

More important matters called the leading warriors away, and the case of Ephraim Cronkhite was laid aside for future consideration.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EVIDENCE OF EARS.

WHEN the defenders of Bella Vista were certain that their enemies had abandoned the plateau, the only wonder was that they had not done so sooner.

It must have been evident to them, after the failure of their attempt to surprise the place, that they could not capture the stone house by any assault or siege.

Then came the disastrous failure of the attack with the aid of a bunch of hay, and after that the presence of troops in the valley must have strongly hinted to them that they had better get up and go.

But it seemed to have been reserved for the dynamite effort to determine their motions and send them off in a hurry.

As this must have been the last impelling cause, Hark Sarpy and his friends were naturally anxious to learn what damage had actually been done among them by the explosion.

They hastened to visit the recent camp of the Apaches, but failed to derive much satisfaction from the visit.

They found a big hole in the ground there, but nothing more.

Though there was nothing but an open field at the place, with no timber or rock to fly about and spread destruction, it was believed that the explosion of the gunpowder and the dynamite must have been attended with a pretty serious loss of life.

No sign of anything of the sort was visible under the closest inspection.

The Apaches had put their dead out of sight, and had carried away their wounded, if any, leaving nothing for their enemies to gloat over but what their imaginations might supply.

Scouts were sent to the western and southern sides of the plateau to examine the valley and pass for signs of the departed Indians; but they were nowhere in sight.

Though they had covered their tracks so carefully, they had made a hasty flitting, and were probably out of sight of Bella Vista at day-break.

Hark Sarpy was then bent on carrying out with the least possible delay his project of pursuing the Apaches and seeking to recover his lost child.

He had only to mention it to secure volunteers.

Every man on the place offered to accompany him, and entreated to be allowed to do so.

"Somebody must be left here to take care of the women-folks," said he, "and I have already settled that matter in my mind. I shall want Shawnee Jim with me, as there is no trailer like him anywhere. As Manuel is away, that leaves Barney to stay here, for one, and I wish, Mr. Stepney, that you would stay here with him."

This was an unexpected proposition to Mark, but not an unpleasing one.

Though he was more than willing to participate in the fatigues and perils of the pursuit, yet to stay at beautiful Bella Vista with Hettie Sarpy was vastly more to his liking.

"How about Jack Bunn?" he demanded.

"Why don't you take me and leave him?"

"Because," bluntly answered the leader, "I think he can be of more use to me than you can, and I want him to go, if he is willing to."

"We may strike a telegraph line, you see," suggested Jack.

He was glad enough to go, as he was as fond of adventure as anybody, and he hastened to prepare his strange battery and wire.

The party as thus made up was composed of Hark Sarpy, Shawnee Jim, Captain Dunning and his son Bob, Jack Bunn, Joe Buller and Ben Boggs—seven in all.

It was not pretended that they were strong enough to force a conflict with the Apaches; but it was expected that they would hang about the rear of the enemy and watch for chances.

At the least they could keep the trail, and possibly send information that would enable troops to head off the Indians, if, as was supposed, their destination was the Chiracahua Mountains.

Their horses had all been taken from them, but that was a matter of little consequence to Hark Sarpy, as he said that the Indians would not be likely to travel faster than they could, and in the event of overtaking them, horses would be more of an incumbrance than a help.

They loaded up with ammunition and provisions, bid farewell to their friends at Bella Vista, and descended by the cut in the eastern side of the cliff to the pass.

No signs of the departed Apaches were found there; but they speedily discovered the location of the little camp in the glen where the horses had been kept, and from that point the trail was easy enough to follow by the tracks of the horses.

It led directly across the valley to an opening in the hills on the other side, and there an unexpected discovery was made.

The party of Apaches had divided.

That is to say, as it appeared to the searchers, one of the bands that had united at Bella Vista had struck into the hills, while the other had gone up the valley.

As the object of Hark Sarpy's party was mainly the recovery of Eva, the question then was, which band she had gone with, and this matter required close and careful investigation.

"Those who have gone into the hills," said the leader, "probably mean to cross the range and then strike southward for the Gila; but I can't imagine why the others have split off toward the north."

As this question did not need to be settled then, he requested his friends to stand back while he and Shawnee Jim made an examination of the trail at the point of division.

They found nothing to indicate the direction which Eva had taken, and that point was involved in an unpleasant uncertainty until Bob Dunning spoke up.

"Jest let me take a squint at that trail," said he. "It's likely that Eva rode her own pony. He was shod on the fore feet only, and I know his tracks."

This was valuable information, and Bob was at once put forward to search the trail.

He speedily found the tracks for which he was looking, and followed them as they led into the hills, making it clear that Eva's pony had taken that direction, and it was to be supposed that she was riding him.

"The party that she is with," said Hark Sarpy, "must of course be the one that raided Captain Dunning's ranch and came down the valley. The other must be the band that Zeke Stebbins is with, or was with. I would give something to know why they have gone northward. But we needn't bother about them, I suppose, as what we have to do is clear enough, and the division of the bands makes our chances much better."

Following his lead, the party went forward hopefully.

No effort was required to keep the trail, as the deep ravine into which the opening led would not allow them to get out of it.

It was a very rough and difficult route, and Sarpy's friends agreed in the opinion that he had been right in saying that they could easily follow the Apaches on foot.

The Apaches probably had seven or eight hours the start of their pursuers, and yet the latter moved as cautiously as if they expected to stumble upon them at any moment.

This caution was quite justifiable, as the ravine had its intricacies and recesses where a crafty foe might lie in ambush and easily make an end of seven or eight men.

One point upon which the pursuers relied for their safety was the presence of horses among the Apaches, as they might be expected to make more or less noise, however silent and crafty their riders should be.

It was a fact, however, as the white men were before long led to believe, that the savages were jogging along easily, perceiving no occasion for any special hurry or caution.

When the first camp which they had made was reached, there was no evidence of hurry there, nor had they taken the least pains to cover their tracks.

The ashes of their fire had been left, and the presence of the horses was plainly visible, and everything showed that they were inclined to take their ease.

Sarpy and the Shawnee were able to judge from the signs pretty closely at what hour they had made the camp and how long they had remained there.

As they were unaware of Hark Sarpy's interest in the girl who had come back to them, they doubtless supposed that the people at Bella Vista would welcome their absence too gladly to care to pursue them or bother with them any further.

Though it was not doubted that Eva was with them, the white people searched in vain at that place for any sign of her presence, and her horse had left no perceptible trail on the stony pathway.

They discovered, however, something that made them sure of one point and enabled them to infer another.

Drops of blood were scattered about the recent camp of the Apaches, and at one point the red stains were quite plentiful.

All the party had the same conjecture as to the cause of this unpleasant sight, but no person mentioned it for a while.

Further searching resulted in the discovery of an ear, and then of another ear.

They were the ears of a white man, and had been cut off with a sharp knife close to the head.

This accounted for the blood, and there could be no question of the identity of the white man.

"Poor Eph Cronkhite!" exclaimed Captain Dunning as he sadly gazed at the ears. "I was hopin' that he would pass among the 'Paches fur a crazy man, and that they wouldn't hurt him; but I reckon they must ha' set him down fur what he was, a squar', stiddy-goin' fool. It's mighty hard on him, but nothin' to what's a-comin', I'm afeard."

"They haven't killed him yet, anyhow," suggested Sarpy.

"No—better if they had. They're jest takin' him along to have fun with him whenever they feel in the humor fur worryin' a white man, and they'll be likely to make him last as long as they kin. Poor Eph!"

"As we are certain that these Apaches have got him," said Sarpy, "we may be pretty sure that the girl is with them too, as they both belonged to this band."

"Thar's a leetle comfort in that, anyhow."

"If we push on we can easily overtake them, and may be able to save his life yet. They can't get out of these hills inside of two days, and we will want to strike them at night. Now, my friends, I am going to call on your legs to do some good work."

The spirits of all were willing, and their flesh was not weak.

The next day there was ample evidence to show that they had succeeded in getting close to the savages.

In fact, the trail was so fresh that it was deemed advisable to slow up, lest they should lose more than they might gain, by overtaking their enemies too soon.

When night set in, as they were creeping cautiously along the narrow and difficult gorge, they espied a light ahead.

They were evidently near the camp of the Apaches and Hark Sarpy called a halt.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"A CAMPAIGN ALONE."

FROM the position of the light that was visible at no great distance it was evident that the canyon took a rise at the place where the Apaches had made their camp for the night.

They had stationed themselves, probably from the force of habit rather than in the exercise of caution that was believed to be needed, where they could look down upon the trail behind them.

Thus they occupied an excellent defensive position, as a direct attack could only be made by climbing the rise, and the sides of the gorge were by no means favorable to flanking movements.

The strength of the position was speedily recognized by the pursuers, in spite of the darkness, and their spirits sunk as they looked ahead and wondered what they were to do next.

It seemed to them at the moment that their labor and care had gone for nothing, as they had reached the enemy only to find them unassailable.

Hark Sarpy had a different opinion, and was not at all set back by the position of the Apaches.

What was unexpected to the others seemed to be to him just what he had expected and hoped for.

He led his followers forward a little further, and carefully posted them so that they could not be visible from the rise, and would be fully covered by the rocks.

"What are we goin' to do here?" demanded Captain Dunning. "This don't look a bit like business to me."

"But it is business!" replied Sarpy. "You must let me manage it in my own way."

"What's your game, then?"

"I am going to make a campaign alone against those Apaches."

"The thunder you are! I don't see much chance fur the seven of us, and none at all fur one."

"There is a chance for me, my friend, as you will be likely to admit before long. I have been here before. I know all about that rise where the Apaches have camped. I know it better than they do. I am going up there on the right."

side of the canyon, and you will hear from me after a bit."

"How'll we hear?"

"You will hear my rifle speak. Don't bother about me, as I will be quite as safe as you are. All you have to do is to stay right here, and if the Apaches should happen to come down to hunt what hurt them, you will know what to do to them."

"That's a fact, anyhow."

Captain Dunning grumbled that the leader wanted to have all the fun for himself, but remained where he was posted, and obeyed the instructions that had been given him.

Hark, the Hater, entered upon his solitary campaign systematically and in a style which showed that he was thoroughly in earnest about it.

He examined his rifle carefully, took his bearings exactly, and speedily disappeared in the darkness at the right of the gorge.

No Apache could have surprised him in the silence and secrecy of his movements, and Shawnee Jim and Manuel would have envied him if they could have seen him.

Among the rocks and scattered shrubs at the side of the canyon he crept noiselessly, gradually ascending after he struck the rise, and keeping himself well covered without trusting to the darkness to conceal him.

When he had reached a point opposite to the Apache camp, he was at a little distance above it, and in a position similar to that which he had occupied with his young friends at the time of the first attempt with dynamite.

Before him was a rude breastwork of rock, broken and seamed; beneath him was a small space of rock that was nearly level, and behind rose the steep and rugged mountain.

While the position had its advantages for attack and defense, there was clearly no retreat except to go back over the course by which he had arrived, and in that event foes below him could easily cut him off.

It seemed to be a very rash enterprise that he had engaged in, but he evidently knew what he was about.

He felt about on the rock beneath him until he found a flat stone, which he raised and set on its edge.

The stone had covered a hole in the rock, very dark at the time, but deep and wide enough to easily hold a man.

There could be no doubt that Hark Sarpy had been there before, and that he was well acquainted with this hole and the uses to which it could be put.

As the high portion of the pass just below him had long been a favorite camping-ground for wandering Apaches, it may be supposed that he had proved the capabilities of the position.

It was possible that venomous serpents might inhabit the hole, and he felt in it with his rifle, but elicited no rattle and touched nothing soft.

Then he was ready for business.

Through a break in the rock before him he made a careful survey of the enemy's camp.

Most of the Apaches were on the rocks at the other side of the gorge, solemnly and sedately passing a pipe about, and the fire cast a weird light upon their bronze forms and painted features.

Eva was seated further down the pass and quite alone, seemingly in an attitude of meditation, and there was a fierce light in her father's eyes as he looked at her and then at her savage owners.

On the near side of the gorge, and almost directly under the position of the spy, was a white man, bound to the trunk of a blasted tree.

He was naked to the waist, and the dead wood showed on each side of his lank body.

Though it was difficult for Sarpy to get a view of him, he was sure that the white man was Ephraim Cronkwhite, and could see that his face was pale and woe-begone.

It was apparent that the savages proposed to amuse themselves with the manly sport of throwing knives at their victim, the game being to see which could strike the nearest to his skin without cutting it.

The young and ambitious bucks stood up near the fire, and were preparing to begin the game when Hark Sarpy looked down upon them.

One of them threw his knife and made an excellent shot, the sharp blade striking the wood close to the white man's flesh, and quivering as it held there.

The Apostle of Peace lifted up his voice against this cruel and dangerous sport.

"Beware, my red brethren!" he cried, pitiously. "When you hurt me you harm your best friend! Lord, have mercy upon these ignorant and wrong-headed savages!"

His words of entreaty were not understood, and served only to raise a laugh among those to whom they were addressed.

If they had been understood perhaps the ridicule would have been greater.

The other young buck was about to throw his knife, when the amusement was suddenly interrupted.

It was not Hark Sarpy who interrupted it,

but his Apache daughter, who seemed to have just awakened to a knowledge of what was going on.

She ran like a deer into the midst of the camp, passing the fire, and placed herself in front of the prisoner, facing his persecutors.

In that position she addressed to them some vigorous language in the Apache tongue, which Sarpy did not clearly understand, but he knew that she was interfering for the protection of the prisoner.

As she touched her head significantly more than once it was to be supposed that she was endeavoring to persuade them that Ephraim Cronkwhite was a crazy man.

The Apaches, however, with the aid of Zeke Stebbins, had formed their own opinions on that point, and Carroh and another warrior started toward her.

"She has white blood in her, anyhow," muttered her father, as he made ready to shoot down any person who should attempt to harm her.

But the Apaches, though they dragged her away forcibly, spoke to her good-humoredly, and their violence was reasonably gentle.

That cause of disturbance being removed, the two knife-throwers stood up to resume their sport.

It was then that Hark Sarpy interfered to put a complete stop to the performance.

As one of them raised his knife, a lance of fire shot forth from the rock in front of him with a loud report, and he fell dead.

Instantly came a second flash and report, and his comrade dropped beside him.

A third shot from the death-dealing Winchester added a third savage to the list of the slain.

The first shot had aroused the Apaches to the most energetic action.

It was as if a bolt of lightning had fallen among them, except that its source and intent were only too well known to them.

Instantly half a dozen warriors started toward the rock, and it would take them but a few seconds to climb it and discover their secret foe.

It was this for which the spy had prepared.

He dropped into the hole in the rock with his rifle, and drew the flatstone over the opening.

Directly the Apaches came swarming up the rock and over into the position which he had so lately occupied.

No person was there.

He could easily hear their ejaculations of wonder and dismay as they thoroughly searched the locality and found nothing.

They called to their companions, and some of them hunted back along the route by which he had come, but were equally unsuccessful in that direction.

With the concealed spy the only question then was, how long they would keep up the useless search, as he was aching for a chance to get out and play the same game again.

He knew them well enough to suppose that they would finally come to the conclusion that there was something supernatural about the mysterious affair, and would get away from the dreaded locality.

It was not the first time that Apaches had been secretly slain at that spot, and there might be some in the band who knew of what had previously happened there.

But he hoped to get a few more shots at them before they left, in the hope of reducing their numbers, so that his party should be more nearly an equal match for them.

While he was listening and waiting for his chance he heard from the backward trail the notes of a cavalry bugle.

Though the sound was naturally a cheering one, as indicating the near presence of friends, the spy was not at all disposed to welcome it just then, as it gave the alarm to the Apaches, and would precipitate their flight.

He might not get a chance for those few more shots.

As he crouched in the hole, the sounds that came to his ears told him of the effect of the bugle-notes.

The horses were being hastily got ready, and the Apaches were preparing for their immediate departure.

At one time he was quite sure that the searchers in his vicinity had gone away, and he was about to raise the stone and come out, when voices near him taught him the necessity of continued caution.

He remained in the hole, fretting over his compulsory inaction until not a sound was to be heard anywhere about him.

Then he raised the stone by degrees, listened, looked around, and finally lifted himself out of the hole.

The Apache camp was deserted, and the fire was scattered.

None of the retreating red-men were in sight, and he had missed his chance for those few shots more.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BELLA VISTA IN PERIL.

In the mean time, the quiet which the owner of Bella Vista had expected to reign there in his absence had not reigned.

It had been quiet enough immediately after the departure of Hark Sarpy and his party, and Hettie had needed the combined efforts of Mark Stepney and Mrs. Dunning to cheer her up when she realized that her father had gone on an expedition of danger.

Gradually she recovered her spirits, and walked out in the grounds with Mark, visiting the scene of the dynamite explosion, and lamenting the loss of her favorite horse which had been carried off by the Apaches.

To the young man that day was productive of much pleasure, and it was natural that he should congratulate himself on having been left behind in such good company.

As the young lady's father could not have failed to perceive the attraction of the two young people for each other, it was reasonable to suppose that he had considered it when he left Stepney in charge of his daughter.

It was not long before they learned that they were lovers, and Mark, who had arranged with Barney Driscoll to take turns in watching the pass, was grieved when his turn came to go on guard.

Hettie, however, proposed to stand his watch with him, and did so, and he was able to attend to his duty without taking any time from pleasant occupations.

Though there was not the least apprehension of any danger, the Apaches being supposed to be far from Bella Vista, the instructions of Hark Sarpy were strictly obeyed, and no precaution that could be taken was neglected.

Thus the day passed pleasantly, and when night set in Barney relieved the other half of the garrison at the pass, and Mark and Hettie transferred the scene of their delight to the house.

After supper they sat out on the veranda, enjoying the clear and balmy air of evening, and naturally were in no hurry to go in and make an end of the day that had been so eventful to them.

Mrs. Dunning sat out there with them an hour or so; but, easily perceiving that they were wrapped up in each other, she finally concluded that her presence was not indispensable, and retired for the night.

Shortly after she had gone inside, the reveries of the lovers were rudely interrupted by a shot, and then another, coming from the eastern side of the plateau, just as had happened when the attack of the Apaches was announced.

This surely betokened a new danger, and Mark besought the young lady to go into the house while he should wait and learn what was the matter.

She refused to leave him, and he was still urging her when there was another shot, and a bullet flew so close to her head that she turned pale.

Mark then led her in, got his rifle, and hurried back.

He reached the veranda just in time to catch sight of Barney Driscoll, who was running toward the house as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Injuns!" almost breathlessly cried the Irishman, as soon as he came within hearing distance. "The 'Paches is come back, an' be durned to thim!"

A shot from behind the fugitive gave point to his words and Stepney fired at the flash.

Again and again his Winchester spoke, and answering bullets rattled against the stone house; but he held his ground until he caught Barney by the hand and hurried him inside.

Then they both opened a vigorous fire from behind the stone walls upon the advancing foe.

Barney was right in saying that the Apaches had come back.

These raiders were, in fact, one of the combined bands that had previously attacked and besieged Bella Vista—the same band that had split off and gone up the valley, thus causing Hark Sarpy much wonderment and a little uneasiness.

The band was acting under the guidance and advice of Zeke Stebbins, who promised the Apaches that they should be amply revenged upon Hark Sarpy if they would follow his instructions.

He rightly judged that the Hater, learning of the departure of his enemies, would follow them for the purpose of picking off some of the warriors, and that he would not go alone.

This would leave Bella Vista with few defenders, giving the Apaches a good chance to capture the house and its inmates.

As one of the inmates was Hark Sarpy's daughter, the blow would be the severest that could be dealt him.

With this object in view the renegade directed the Indians to keep on up the valley until they were out of sight of Bella Vista.

While they were engaged in looting Captain Dunning's ranch, he remained in hiding below, to watch for chances that would allow him to carry out his plans.

Greatly to his delight, he saw Sarpy and his party issue from the pass, cross the valley, and enter the hills on the other side.

He was able to count them, and it added to his delight to learn that there were seven men.

who were going away, thus leaving Bella Vista comparatively defenseless.

Of course this opportunity overjoyed him, and he was eager to take advantage of it.

There was no need of hurry.

Night was the time for an attack and a surprise, and in the mean time he had only to wait and make sure that the white men did not return.

Before night he had satisfied himself on this point, and had informed the Apaches of the condition of affairs, congratulating them upon the great chance that was offered them.

As the white men had not returned when night set in, it was reasonably certain that they were then so far away that no interference on their part need be apprehended.

The Indians left their horses where they had been concealed before, and again essayed the secret entrance at the northern end of the plateau, which had been left unguarded, as nobody supposed that the same band would make another attempt so soon.

It was expected that this attempt would be a surprise, as the previous one had been intended to be; but it failed just as the other had failed, this time through the vigilance of Barney Driscoll.

Though there was then no hope of surprise, the chances for the capture of the stronghold seemed to be largely in favor of the Apaches, as it was so weakly defended.

They could not be sure how many were in the house; but Zeke Stebbins had no doubt that there were but few, and it was reasonable to suppose that an attack on the four sides of the house would soon wear them out, even if it should fail to find some point undefended.

But the Apaches and their white ally left out of the calculation two such important elements as Mrs. Dunning and Shawnee Kate, both of whom had roughed it until they were nearly as good fighters as their male companions.

While Mark Stepney was making a noise on the veranda without accomplishing much, the two women were vigorously attending to the most important part of the defense of the house, putting up the storm doors and shutters.

At the first alarm Mrs. Dunning had run down-stairs in scanty clothing, and had found Kate already at work on the shutters.

Hester Sarpy joined them, forgetting other matters for the moment, and did such service as deserve and received their compliments.

As the thick plank defenses were very heavy, it was fortunate that they had but a few of them to put up, and those on the lower floor.

Those which Hark Sarpy and his friends put up had not yet been extensively removed, and in this respect it was well that the second attack had not been longer delayed.

The women had weapons, too, Shawnee Kate possessing a rifle of her own, and finding one for Mrs. Dunning.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEATH AND DESPAIR.

MARK STEPNEY and Barney Driscoll, with their repeating rifles, were kept busy in stopping the rush of the foremost Apaches while the defenses were being made secure.

Barney fired with the steadiness and deliberation of an old campaigner, and Mark with the ardor and rapidity of a new recruit.

Between them they certainly made a vigorous show of warfare, astonishing the savages if they did not frighten them, and succeeded in checking the advance if they did no real execution.

As soon as the storm shutters were secure in their places, Mr. Dunning and Shawnee Kate took positions with the judgment of old Indian-fighters, and joined effectively in the defense.

Mrs. Dunning, indeed, speedily promoted herself to the rank of commander of the fortress, giving orders as one in authority, and being implicitly obeyed, at least by the men.

The Apaches, finding themselves foiled in their attempt to capture the house with a rush, did the next best thing, and laid siege to it in a style that was calculated in the course of time to accomplish their object.

They scattered about the grounds on all sides of the house, sheltering themselves behind the trees, and watched for chances to pick off the white people.

The night was not as dark as the two previous nights had been, as there were no clouds in the sky; but there was no moon, and it was still dark enough to prevent the garrison from getting a good aim at their outlying enemies, while the latter always had something to fire at.

In the house the lights had been turned down low; but there was still light enough to show the loop-holes, and they were made marks for many bullets, some of which entered them.

The consequence of this was that the garrison fought shy of loop-holes, and the enemy were allowed to arrange their affairs pretty much as they pleased.

After this desultory warfare had been carried on for some time, Mrs. Dunning came to the conclusion that the Apaches were about to concentrate their efforts upon an attack on the back door.

The evidence of this was found in the fact that most of them seemed to have gathered at the rear of the house, where they kept up a close and rapid fire with a reckless use of ammunition, and some of them could be dimly perceived preparing something that might be intended to serve as a battering-ram.

The sturdy female commander prepared to meet this emergency with a desperate measure of defense.

She allowed no light to come near the window over the back door, and made ready some boiling hot water.

Then she waited and watched.

It was just as she suspected; the intention was to burst in the door.

She saw several Apaches advancing toward the door with a beam, while the firing of their outlying comrades became closer and more rapid than ever.

Then she and Shawnee Kate hurried up-stairs with a big vessel filled with boiling water, and prepared for the attack by removing the shutter and quietly raising the window-sash.

As it was utter darkness where they were, they ran no risk of being observed from without, but kept themselves carefully aside from the window and out of the reach of stray bullets.

On came the eager Apaches, and as they neared the house they broke into a run.

Mark and Barney, fully appreciating the peril, worked their rifles as best they could, regardless of danger, and a lucky bullet struck one of the Apaches just as they were about to deliver a blow with the beam.

His fall caused another on his side to stumble, and the beam was dropped.

Before it could be picked up, Mrs. Dunning and Kate raised their vessel of boiling water, and with a combined effort threw its contents down upon the struggling group.

Instantly a number of shots were fired at the window from the outside, and bullets came rattling in before the women could withdraw.

One of them struck Mrs. Dunning in the cheek, inflicting an ugly wound; but it did not hinder her from helping Shawnee Kate to put up the shutter in a hurry.

Among the Apaches the effect of the sousing was instantaneous.

Some of them were badly scalded, and not one of them failed to receive a portion of the shower.

The average Apache is not partial to water in any form, and to these the sudden bath was a great surprise.

When the hot deluge fell upon their naked skins, they shrieked and howled with pain, and those who were the worst hurt showed the greatest alacrity in getting out of the way.

The style in which they leaped and danced to the tune of their own yells as they ran back to cover, would have been highly amusing in a less perilous situation.

Mrs. Dunning tied up her face with the help of Shawnee Kate and Hettie; but she was clearly out of the fight, though still able to give advice and instructions.

Another and yet more serious disaster soon befell the garrison.

Barney Driscoll was aiming at a sneaking Apache who was approaching the house, when a bullet came in at the loophole and crashed through his brains.

He never knew what hurt him, and after a few convulsive gasps he was quiet in death.

This filled the house with grief and consternation.

Hester Sarpy had never before seen a man who had been killed by a bullet, and the fate of Barney gave her for the first time a full realization of the peril of herself and her companions.

They also sadly realized it, and were obliged to admit, that there was then little hope for them.

Barney Driscoll had been not only a friend but a defender, and his loss at that time was a great calamity.

With their full force the chances of the garrison had been bad enough; with Barney dead and Mrs. Dunning disabled, they were desperate indeed.

The Apaches had received such a lesson in their recent scalding, that they would not be likely to try that game again; but there were plenty of other games to try.

It would be simply impossible for two persons to defend the house, strong and well-secured as it was, against the force outside.

One or the other of them was as liable to be picked off as Barney had been.

Part of the Apaches might engage their attention at one side of the house while the others should make a successful attack on the other side.

At the best they must soon be worn out and compelled to abandon the defense by sheer exhaustion.

There was not the faintest hope of the return of their friends who had gone away in the morning, or of the arrival of any other succor.

Hark Sarpy was on the trail of his lost child, and would be sure not to relinquish it while there was a chance of recovering her.

Besides, when he went away he was confident

that after the departure of the Apaches Bella Vista was out of danger.

As for any other help, they knew how the soldiers had passed them by the day before, unable to discover them, and they could not hope that anybody would find them.

Thus it was that sorrow and gloom settled down upon the house at Bella Vista and its remaining inmates.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MANUEL'S MISSION.

WHEN Manuel had made good his escape with the horse he had reclaimed from the Apaches, he neither feared nor expected pursuit.

He had got away so swiftly that if the savages had attempted to pursue him they would have been unable to decide in the darkness whether he had headed up or down the valley.

Though he considered himself entirely safe on that score, he did not, sensibly, relax his speed, even after he had got well out of the way.

His object was to overtake the soldiers as soon as possible and bring them back to Bella Vista, and in the pursuit of this object he was capable of any exertion.

That he had left one Apache dead and another probably so, raised his spirits and inspired him with strong hope for the future.

He had an excellent horse under him, too, and the steed seemed to feel the responsibility that was resting on him as well as his rider.

In going up the valley he did not need to find or follow a trail, as there was no practicable egress on either side for the mounted soldiers, and they must of necessity have gone straight ahead.

It was not until the valley terminated in a tangled maze of hills and ravines, that he was obliged to dismount and search for the trail.

He found it without difficulty, as it was broad enough, and easily discovered where it struck into the hills.

Then his task became harder; but he soon reached the place where the cavalry had made a camp, and knew that he was on the right track.

They were evidently pressing forward rapidly, as they had halted there but a little while, and Manuel had no time to lose.

His progress was slow until daylight, when he picked up the trail at once, and followed it without any more trouble, overtaking the soldiers a little before noon.

They proved to be a detachment of forty men under Hark Sarpy's friend, Captain Lang, and they were looking for a band of hostiles which was probably the same that made the attack on Bella Vista.

Manuel told his story as briefly and plainly as his command of the language would allow, and he was not half through it when Captain Lang had halted his command and was leading them back toward the valley and Bella Vista.

The Mexican finished his recital as they rode on, and the officer was eager not only to go to the rescue of the white people, but to capture or exterminate the Apaches.

"We were sure that there was some sort of trouble up on that hill," said he, "but could not for our lives make out what it was. It was impossible to see anybody, white or red, and equally impossible to find any way of getting up there. So we were obliged to give it up and go on."

"We fired guns and made smoke," suggested Manuel.

"Yes, but that told us nothing that we could take hold of. Now we know what it meant, and with you to guide us, we may do a good stroke of work."

When he had been put on the right track, Captain Lang was not slow to follow it.

He made his troopers urge their horses to the best speed that was left in them, and pressed forward as rapidly as possible.

In spite of their efforts it was nearly dark when they passed Captain Dunning's ranch, and quite dark when they came in sight of the cliffs of Bella Vista.

Manuel, who remembered how the bugle had warned the Indians as well as the white people the previous day, begged that the obnoxious instrument might be left unblown, and Captain Lang wisely ordered that it should be silent.

The question whether the white people and their enemies were still on the plateau was soon settled by the reports of rifle-shots from that direction, occasionally quite rapid and plentiful.

It was certain then that the house was still defended, but that the assailants were making a more vigorous attack upon it than ever.

Manuel was feverishly impatient to get forward, and, as Captain Lang was scarcely less eager, they soon reached the point where they were to begin operations.

The Mexican first paid a hasty visit to the camp where he had got his horse.

To his great surprise he found it deserted.

It was possible that the Indians he had left there might have been brought up on the plateau as a reinforcement to their comrades, or for their own safety; but what could have been done to the horses?

Manuel was obliged to treat this as a mystery,

and he reported the result of his little scout to Captain Lang, who said that there was nothing for them to do but to go right on and let the mysteries solve themselves.

They left their horses at the mouth of the pass in care of a guard, and hastened forward under the guidance of the Mexican, who could find his way there in the darkness as well as in the daylight.

He led them up the cut in the side of the cliff at the eastern side of the plateau, believing that the Apaches would have seen no necessity of guarding it.

His conjecture proved to be correct, and he was proud indeed when the dismounted cavalry filed out of the cut upon the plateau.

The sharp and rapid firing which they heard as they were coming up the pass, and which naturally quickened their steps, had then ceased; but there were occasional shots in the vicinity of the house, proving that it had not been captured, and that the hostiles were yet there.

A few men were left at the cut, and a few were sent to a point which Manuel indicated, to prevent the escape of stray Apaches, and with the main body, Captain Lang moved in skirmishing order toward the house.

No Indians were in sight when they started; but they soon met them as they passed through the timber, and the sharp reports of carbines and rifles made the plateau livelier than it had yet been.

This attack in the rear was a terrible surprise to the Apaches, and it did not take them long to learn that it was made by a considerable body of regular troops.

The soldiers were formidable in such a position as that, however much the savages might despise them among the hills and in the passes.

Confused and scattered as they were, the Apaches at the moment thought only of flight, and they ran before the skirmish line more rapidly than it could advance.

So the way to the house was speedily opened, and the soldiers reached the clear space in front of the building.

The firing with which the blue-coats announced their arrival startled and surprised the people within the house, and it soon dispersed the cloud of gloom that had settled upon them.

It was evident, when they reflected upon the matter, that the Apaches had been attacked, as the recent firing began in the direction of the eastern plateau, and the firing at the house had suddenly ceased.

Conjecture became certain when they saw the dark forms of Indians running as if for life, and one of them threw up his hands and fell dead in front of the house.

The unanimous opinion at that time was expressed by Mrs. Dunning when she said that Mr. Sarpy and his friends had returned.

This seemed to be quite unlikely; but who else could have arrived?

Mark Stepney suddenly came to a different conclusion when the blue-coats came bursting through the timber and neared the house.

"They are soldiers!" he cried. "Manuel has brought them. We are safe now. I only wish that poor Dunning was alive to welcome them."

He hastily opened the front door, and was greeted by Captain Lang.

"Hello! Are you all alive here yet?"

"Some of us are," answered Mark; "but none of us would have been alive much longer if you had not come."

"Glad that we got here in time. Where is Sarpy?"

"He went off this morning with most of the men, after the Apaches had left here."

"After they had left here. That's queer. There seems to be plenty of them here now. But I have no time for explanations, as I must see what can be done with these sneaking redskins."

The task of the blue-coats was not finished, and they had a rather difficult problem to confront.

Though the Apaches had been stampeded, they were not by any means got rid of.

To search for them in the darkness, while they had the advantage of the trees, and of their knowledge of the ground, would be a winning game in time, but might cause a considerable loss of life among the hunters.

After consideration, Captain Lang came to the conclusion that he had better seek to prevent their escape through the night, and settle with them in the morning.

Leaving a few men at the house, he divided the remainder of his force equally, and sent them to occupy the heads of the two passes to the plateau.

They built fires out on the open, in front of their respective positions, so that no Apache could approach them without being seen.

When he had completed his arrangements, the officer returned with Manuel to the house, where he was warmly welcomed, and a full account of both the Apache attacks was given him.

"And so Hark Sarpy has gone on the trail of part of the hostiles," said he. "I wish I was with him, and I will do my best to overtake him, as soon as I can get away from here. But I won't be able to straighten up these Indians before morning, and that puts me back."

Before morning the Apaches made an attack upon the guard at the lower post; but it was easily repulsed, as they had no cover for their advance.

When day broke it did not take them long to discover that they were at the mercy of the soldiers.

After a few had been shot down—rather by way of intimidation than as a matter of necessity, the rest came in and surrendered.

They were promptly disarmed and sent off under guard to San Carlos.

Having settled this difficulty, Captain Lang saw his way clear to following Hark Sarpy and his party in their pursuit of the other band, and he lost no time in making the few preparations necessary for that purpose.

He left half a dozen men at the house with Mark Stepney, but took Manuel with him.

Indeed, Manuel would not have remained on any terms, as nobody was so eager as he to get on the trail of the Apaches.

Captain Lang's command was considerably reduced by the details of the guard that was sent to San Carlos and that which was left at Bella Vista; but it was still large enough for his purpose.

Though the men had had little rest of late, they were eager for the expedition, and were only anxious to get on with as little delay as possible.

Under the competent guidance of Manuel, and making few and brief halts, they pushed forward as rapidly as the difficulties of the route would allow.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STERN CHASE.

WHEN Hark Sarpy perceived that his Apaches had got away from him, his first thought was of pursuit, and he hurried back to his friends to start them on the trail.

As he had naturally supposed, the bugle call argued the presence of a cavalry detachment, and he had hardly reached his friends when Captain Lang rode up with Manuel at the head of his men.

The latter at first greeted the new-comers rather coldly, regarding them as responsible for the partial failure of the task he had lately undertaken.

"What in thunder did you blow that infernal horn for?" he gruffly demanded as soon as he met them.

"Hello!" answered Captain Lang. "What's the matter with you, old man? Has anything bit you?"

"That wretched horn of yours has spoiled a fine job of work for me."

"Sorry to hear that, Sarpy. The hornblowing as you call it wasn't intentional, I assure you. In fact, it was against orders. But the bugler has got so in the habit of that sort of thing, that when an advance was ordered just as we had dismounted for a halt, he tooted it out on his horn."

"What was you doing up thar, anyhow?" inquired Captain Dunning of Sarpy.

Hark told them about his ambush and the trouble he had given the Apaches, and related how, to his great disgust, they had fled at the sound of the bugle call.

"That is just into our hand," exclaimed Captain Lang. "We had stopped for a rest when we caught sight of a light ahead, and I at once ordered an advance. But I had no idea that we were so near up with the Apaches. Come! let us follow them on."

"Come on, then!" shouted Hark. "I want to see if they have made an end of the poor devil they were worrying when I was up there."

"By the way, Sarpy," said the officer, "there has been the Old Harry to pay at your place since you left there."

Hark Sarpy was so astonished and overwhelmed by this announcement that his bronzed face turned ashy pale, so he could not command his voice.

"What's that?" he stammered. "Trouble at my place?"

"The Apaches came back there," answered Captain Lang. "But it is all right now, and your folks are safe. Take the horse the Mexican brought, and I will tell you about it as we ride along."

They hastened up the ascent to the recent camp of the Apaches, where they found ample evidence of the hurry with which its occupants had decamped.

The bodies of the two young bucks who had been slaughtered by the latter were lying where they fell, and it was understood that the savages must have been terribly demoralized when they got away without caring for their dead.

But they had found time to do a villainous piece of spite work before they scampered.

Hark Sarpy, looking about for Ephraim Cronkhite, heard a faint groan, and found the unfortunate Apostle of Peace lying at the foot of the trunk to which he had been tied.

The sight was horrible in the extreme, as the savages had torn the scalp from his head while he was yet alive, and had left him to perish.

There was no fatal wound upon his person;

but he was clearly beyond the reach of surgery, and even his minutes were numbered.

As Hark Sarpy bent over him, his lips moved feebly, and he uttered a few words that were heard by careful listening.

"Forgive them—they were angered."

The next moment he breathed his last, dying, in spite of his bitter experience, in the belief that had brought him to Arizona and delivered him up to the savages.

He was hastily buried in a hole among the rocks, and his grave was marked by a pile of stones that were heaped upon it as a guard against the beasts of prey.

Captain Dunning sadly spoke the epitaph of his wife's relative, and it was brief and to the point.

"He meant well; but he didn't know."

Hark Sarpy informed the officer and his friends that the Apache camp was near the mouth of the pass, and that they would soon emerge from the hills and have a dead run after the fugitives on their way to the Chiricahua Mountains.

They rode forward as rapidly as possible, and soon came out on a broad and sandy plain.

As it was quite dark, the flying Apaches were not to be seen; but their trail was plain enough at the start, and there could be no reasonable doubt of the course they had taken.

There was nothing for it then but a stern chase, and in this instance a stern chase was sure to be a long chase, as the fugitives were well mounted, while seven of the pursuers were unprovided with horses.

This evil was partly remedied by the mounting of the men afoot behind the troopers; but the cavalry horses, not very good at the best, were wearied by forced marches and little rest, and so were their riders.

Hark Sarpy took Jack Bunn behind him on his favorite horse, and Manuel, who had the eagerness and the hold-out of a hound, ran along in front to make sure that they should not slip the trail.

Soon they came to a road, and along the road ran a line of telegraph poles—cheering signs of civilization when not in the wilderness.

Captain Lang halted and looked sadly at the line of poles.

"If I knew of a telegraph station anywhere about here," said he, "I believe I would take time to hunt it. But it would probably be of no use, as all the operators have been scared off by the outbreak."

"What's your scheme?" inquired Hark.

"If there was any sort of a chance I would telegraph to have those red-skins headed off at the crossing of the Gila. It's a great pity to strike a telegraph and not be able to use it."

"No trouble about that, captain. My young friend here, Mr. Bunn, is one of the scared-off operators, and he has got the tools to fix it for you."

Jack Bunn had already slipped down from his friend's horse, and was getting out his storage battery and wire.

In a few moments he had made connection with the line on the poles and called up the office which Captain Lang desired to reach.

The officer dictated a message, which Jack sent off in short order, and he speedily repacked his tools.

"That makes me feel a great deal better," said Captain Lang. "If those red-skins are not stopped at the crossing, it will be no fault of mine."

"But we want to catch them, too," observed Hark Sarpy, "and we can't afford to let any chances slip. My child is with them, and I must get her if I have to follow them into Chiricahua."

"We will do our best, Hark; but you know that they can travel faster than we can."

It was true that the pursuers were badly handicapped, and that it was a long ride to the river; but they did their best and pushed forward as rapidly as the jaded condition of men and horses would allow to.

When day broke, and they no longer needed even the sharp eyes of Manuel to keep them on the trail, their progress was somewhat more rapid, but still quite unsatisfactory, especially to Hark Sarpy and Manuel.

At night they were so completely broken down by fatigue and loss of sleep that they were compelled to halt and take a long rest.

Then they had another range of hills to cross, and there, as elsewhere, they found plenty of proof of the sad fact that they were far behind the fugitives.

Hark Sarpy was greatly worried, and Manuel had worked himself up into a fever of excitement, but there was no help for them—they could only do what they could.

When they had wormed their way through the hills, they came out in full view of the plain and the river; but there were no Indians in sight.

Their hope then was that troops might have been sent out in answer to Captain Lang's dispatch, who had captured the Apaches and taken them to the nearest military post.

This hope was taken away from them when they reached the river.

Less than a dozen troopers came trotting toward them from the east, and soon joined Captain Lang's party.

"Where are the Indians?" demanded that officer.

"Hain't seen any Indians," answered the sergeant in charge of the detachment.

"The deuce you haven't! Here is their trail, and any man with half an eye can see where they have crossed the river."

"That's so, captain. It seems that they have got ahead of us."

"I should say that they had. Where have you been keepi. g yourselves?"

"Several miles up the river."

"Of course—that is the usual style. But it is well for you that you were out of the way, as those Apaches would have been likely to whale you and take you into camp, if you had met them. You should have had men enough to picket the river for miles. Confound a man who sends a corporal's guard to stop a herd of Apaches!"

"He said he sent all he could spare," protested the sergeant.

"Well, it is a pity, but it can't be helped now. Some of you fellows will have to give up your horses to these dismounted men, and get back to the fort the best way you can. Ask the commandant to send some rations and ammunition after me as soon as possible. Wait—I will write him a note."

The sergeant received the written message, dismounted seven of his men, and headed a disconsolate detachment as he led them back up the river.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HARK SARPY'S DISCOVERY.

THE route which the flying Apaches would take was well known to Captain Lang and most of them who were with him.

It would lead them into Mexico, unless they should conclude to take refuge in the mountains on this side of the line.

There was reason to hope that they might stop on the American side of the line, as even Apaches cannot stand everything, and men and horses must both be pretty badly used up after the long ride from the camp where Hark Sarpy struck them.

The pursuing party pressed forward, making better time, since each man had a horse to ride; and in course of time reached the mountains south of the river.

To their great joy they discovered that the Apaches had gone into the mountains, doubtless supposing that they would not be pursued so far, or that they would be entirely safe in the intricacies of that difficult range.

This point being settled, the next thing on the programme was to follow and find the savages.

The pursuers were somewhat in the fix of the former who considered his kettle not lost when it was at the bottom of the well, though he did not see his way to get at it.

Hark Sarpy declared that he was well acquainted with the region, as this was not the first time he had followed Apaches into those mountains, and Manuel was sure that he could pick up their trail and follow it, no matter where they had gone.

At the outset of the undertaking a serious difficulty confronted them.

They had been so long on the trail that they had run short of provisions and were entirely out of meat.

It would be two or three days, at the least, before any supplies could reach them, and in the mean time they would have to skirmish about and forage for themselves.

A camp was formed at the base of the mountain range, and Hark Sarpy and Manuel, with Captain Dunning and his two ranch hands, appointed themselves a committee of five to procure provisions for the party.

In this employment they succeeded fairly, though game was not at all plenty, and though they were prohibited from going far into the hills, lest the reports of their rifles should alarm the Indians, who might be somewhere in the vicinity.

At this rate they were in no danger of starving, but were not making any progress in the accomplishment of the purpose that had brought them there.

Hark Sarpy, intensely eager to find and recover his lost child, had no idea of contenting himself with camp life or hunting alone.

After the first day, indeed, his hunting became a sham, and he brought in so little game that his skill in that line might be supposed to have deserted him.

His friends, however, were able to give a pretty good guess at what he was doing, and it was not doubted that under his pretense of hunting lay the fact of scouting.

It was his belief that the Apaches, being pretty well worn out by their long journey and the labors and excitements attending them, felt the need of rest and proper food for themselves and their horses.

Therefore it was likely that they had settled themselves for a while in the first secure retreat they had come to, without giving themselves

any special uneasiness concerning their pursuers.

In that mountain range, which was then the favorite stronghold of the Apaches, there were plenty of places where they could defend themselves against an army, if an army should happen to find them.

This was a matter of experience, as soldiers had followed flying hostiles into those fastnesses, and had been unable even to reach them, to say nothing of conquering and capturing them.

Hark Sarpy had his own opinions on these points.

He did not believe in the fidelity, if he believed in the capacity, of the Indian scouts who served with the army on the frontier, and he had an abiding disbelief in the usefulness of regular soldiers in such warfare.

As a defensive body for the irregulars to fall back upon in case of disaster they might be valuable; but to pit them against Apaches in those mountains was like setting a flock of sheep upon a gang of wolves, as their tactics and discipline and habits entirely unfitted them for Indian fighting.

At the same time the Hater was confident that the right kind of white men—such men as himself and Manuel and Captain Dunning—could cope with the Apaches on their own ground, and would be at least a match for them at their own style of fighting.

The trouble just then was that he had not enough men of the right sort.

He recalled several occasions during the years in which he had been hunting the savages and seeking his child, when he had followed small bands of Apaches to those mountains, tracked them to their retreat, done them more or less damage, and got safely away.

Those experiences had given him a good knowledge of the intricacies of the range, and on this occasion he was determined to use it for all it was worth.

In the course of his scouting he came to a deep and narrow glen, leading upward at a steep incline, which had doubtless in the past been the bed of a watercourse.

He followed it, as he had already followed other leads that promised to take him into the heart of the hills, but was disappointed in this as he had been in the others.

He found no signs of the passage of the Apaches, such as he would have been sure to find if they had taken that route with their horses; but he kept on, curious to learn whither the glen would lead him.

When he had traveled a distance of perhaps three miles from the camp, he discovered that the Apaches could not have taken that route with their horses or on foot.

His progress was suddenly and sharply interrupted by a cliff that formed a wall across the glen, rising to the height of more than fifty feet.

The cliff was more than precipitous; it was an overhanging wall of bare rock, worn smooth by water, as if in the forgotten days of the stream there had been a waterfall over the rock which must have been a sight worth seeing.

A hole at the bottom of the glen had doubtless been dug by the falling water, and when Hark Sarpy reached the cliff a thin stream was trickling over the edge.

Below this wall the glen was narrow with steep sides that supported scarcely any growth of vegetation, and climbing them was out of the question.

Beyond the cliff, however, the mountain seemed to open and spread out, and the tops of large trees could be seen from the bottom of the glen, indicating a considerable space of good ground in that locality.

Clearly it was not possible that the Apaches should have taken that route; but the scout could not help wishing that he might reach the top of the cliff and see what lay beyond.

He was gazing about with this thought in his head, when his quick eyes caught sight of something vastly more interesting to him than what he had yet seen.

It was the painted face of the red-man.

This face looked down on him from beside a boulder at the edge of the cliff.

Only for an instant was it visible there—then it was quickly withdrawn back behind the boulder.

That the scout was astonished at this unexpected sight goes without saying.

He was also startled; but not even by the twitch of a muscle did he show that he was disturbed.

His active mind considered the matter and reached a conclusion instantly.

It was evident that the spy was being spied upon, that the Indian was a scout who was watching his movements.

Doubtless the red scout believed that his presence was unsuspected by the white scout, while he was aware of every motion made by the other.

Sarpy determined not to disabuse him of this belief, but to confirm him in it.

Therefore he stood and sauntered about as he had been doing, gazing now upward at the cliff, and again at the sides of the glen, as if he supposed himself to be entirely alone in that solitude.

This was a ticklish thing to do, and it required no little nerve, as the Indian was undoubtedly there and must be sorely tempted to shoot down the persistent foe of his race; but Sarpy was firmly of the opinion that he would do nothing of the kind.

It was his belief that the red scout was at or near the camp of the Apaches whom his party had been pursuing; and that, so long as he believed that he had not been seen by the white man, he would not fire a shot, lest he should betray the hiding-place of the band to other white men who might be in the vicinity.

Of the justice of this belief Sarpy was soon convinced by experience.

He remained for the space of fully ten minutes in full view from the top of the cliff, and no attempt was made to harm him, and he did not catch another glimpse of the painted face beside the boulder.

But he knew that the savage was still there, and he had a game of his own to play.

He sauntered a little way down the glen, with his eyes down as if looking for a possible trail, and brought up behind a rock that effectually screened him from the view of any person on the cliff.

In one respect he had the advantage of the Apache.

As it was already known that he was there, he need not fear to betray his presence or proximity by firing a shot, and he was determined to have a shot at the watcher.

Hardly had he gotten behind the rock when his rifle was raised, and he rested it against the inside edge of his shelter, waiting for a shot.

He did not have to wait long.

The Apache, unable any longer to see the white man from under the edge of the boulder, suffered his head to protrude from behind his shelter, that he might get a better view.

Seeing nothing of the white man, he advanced the greater part of his body from its concealment and toward the edge of the cliff.

This offered a fair shot; but Sarpy waited for a better chance.

It was evident that the Apache was sure that he had not been seen, or he would not have ventured so far.

Being settled in that belief, he ventured a little further.

Seeing no person in the glen below him, he appeared to imagine that his foe might have gotten under the overhanging cliff, and must be looked for there.

Holding on with his hands, he craned his body over the edge of the rock until nearly half of it projected out into the air, and took a glance at the under side of the cliff.

This was Sarpy's opportunity, and his rifle cracked.

That was the last of the Apache, who pitched forward with a convulsive movement, and dropped upon the rock below.

If the death-shot had left any breath in his body, the fall would have driven it out.

The scout kept himself close in the shelter of the rock, curious to learn what the further effect of his shot might be.

If he was near the Apache camp, it would be sure to bring some more of them to the spot.

His suspicion proved to be true, as three warriors shortly appeared on the top of the cliff.

They looked about to see what had fired the shot, and looked for their comrade, but in vain.

In his fall he had struck a rock at the bottom of the glen, which had "shunted" him in under the cliff, so that he was out of their view.

Another good shot was offered to the concealed scout, if not more than one; but he resisted the temptation.

If the Apaches should discover his presence there within easy rifle-shot, the chances would be decidedly against his getting away alive; whereas, if he should keep quiet and concealed, they might go away after a while.

He preferred that they should regard the affair as a mystery, like the disaster that befell them at the torture of Ephraim Cronkhite, and it was soon evident that they did so regard it, as they withdrew from the edge of the cliff after a brief consultation.

When he was satisfied that they had departed the scout hastened down the glen until he was out of sight of the cliff, and returned to the camp of his friends.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A TOO FRESH TRAIL.

IT was dark when Hark Sarpy got back to camp, and he did not tell the story of his discovery and adventure until after supper.

Even then he was in no hurry to spring it on his comrades, but allowed the usual chaff concerning his want of success as a hunter to draw it out.

"You seem to have had bad luck again, Hark," observed Captain Long, "and I am sorry for you. Not that we need any of your help, as Mr. Dunning and Shawnee Jim and the rest

of them have brought in a fine lot of game, but it is strange that your luck has deserted you, or your skill."

"Mebbe he's been huntin' two-legged game," suggested Captain Dunning.

"With nothing to show for it, I suppose, as usual. What have you been doing for your country to-day, Hark, anyhow?"

"I left my game where I killed it," slowly answered the Hater. "It wasn't the kind that I would trouble myself to bring in, and I don't believe you would care to eat broiled Apache!"

"What! You have struck an Apache? That is news indeed! How and where did you find him?"

"I have struck one Apache—struck him dead—and have seen more. The fact is, my friends, that I have found the camp of the band we pursued down to this range."

This intelligence created a lively excitement in the camp, and all were eager to learn the exact nature and extent of the discovery.

Hark related his adventure with all its details, and was highly praised for his pluck and skill.

Captain Lang was extravagantly elated. He already looked forward to a successful termination of his expedition, and a report that would raise him in the estimation of his superior officers.

"Now we know what we've got to do," said he. "We have meat enough to last us a few days, and we know where to find the Apaches. In the immortal words of General Grant, I propose to move immediately upon their works."

"I reckon, Captain Lang," observed Sarpy, "that it will be best not to count your chickens before they are hatched, and I hope you won't make your report before the job is finished."

"What's the matter with you now, old man?"

"The matter is that we are not out of the woods yet—that we have only begun to get into them. We know where the Apaches are, but we don't know how to get at them."

"That's the pint, Cap," interposed Captain Dunning. "Didn't you hear Hark say that the way was blocked up, dead?"

"We would stand no chance of getting into their camp by the way I took," observed Hark, "unless we could fly."

Captain Lang suggested the possibility of the construction of scaling ladders.

"They would be sure to pick us off before we could get to the cliff, and if we should reach the top they would slaughter us one by one as we climbed up."

"But the Apaches got there," replied the officer, "and why shouldn't we follow them?"

"Now you've struck the point, my friend. What we have to do is to find out the way the red-skins took to get in there, and then to follow that way. The trouble is that it is a darned sight easier to know what to do than to do it."

"And while we are looking for that way the Apaches may leak out and leave us."

"I don't believe they will. I judge that they think they've got a good thing there, and mean to keep it. I am sure that they didn't get a sight of me, and I doubt if they suspect that a white man has been near their camp."

The trail of the fugitives had been lost at a place near the foot of the mountain range where a bed of gravel and bits of stone, washed down by former floods, spread out for a considerable space.

It was so hard and compact that no trail could be found on it by the most careful searching.

Beyond this gravelly space there reached up into the mountain a stretch of bare rock, where there was of course no trail, and beyond that stretch no sign of the Apaches had yet been discovered.

It was not known that the fugitives had crossed the trailless tract for the purpose of getting up into the mountain; but it was supposed that they had, and it was decided that future explorations should begin at that point.

The camp was moved to the locality indicated, and experiments were immediately made for the purpose of penetrating the mountains so as to reach the hiding-place of the Apaches.

Hark Sarpy regarded and treated the soldiers as merely part of the camp—useful as a base of supplies and to fall back on in time of trouble, but not to be depended on for finding the Indians in their fastnesses and attacking them there.

The real work of the campaign was to be done by the irregulars, among whom he allowed Jack Bunn to count himself.

He had fixed in his mind the location of the retreat of the Apaches so that he knew its direction from the previous camp and the new one, the two courses forming an angle of about forty-five degrees.

To know the course was one thing, and to follow it was quite another.

Hark Sarpy divided his force of irregulars into two bodies, one led by himself, and the other commanded by Captain Dunning.

They were to strike the mountain range at two points not far apart, and when they found opening in the general direction which it was de-

sired to follow, were to divide and search as they pleased.

An equal division was made of the men as to quantity, and nearly equal as to quality.

In Sarpy's party were Manuel, Jack Bunn, and one of Captain Dunning's ranchmen.

They crossed the spaces of gravel and bare rock, and entered one of the ravines with which the foot of the mountain range was seamed.

It was not a very difficult route to travel, and they might have brought their horses had they chosen to do so; but it was the opinion of the leader that the search could be better pursued on foot.

The Apaches, it was admitted, might have taken that route; but the closest scrutiny failed to reveal any sign of their passage.

If they had ascended that ravine they had covered their tracks remarkably well.

This ravine bent toward the north, taking the right direction, and they followed it until, in Sarpy's opinion, they had reached a point higher than the place where he supposed the Apache camp to be located, and not far to the south of it.

Here the ravine separated into two smaller ravines, and he divided his party for the purpose of following up each of them.

Manuel and the ranchman took the route that led to the right, and Hark Sarpy and Jack Bunn entered that which led to the left.

Hark was soon disgusted with the course which he and his young friend had taken, as it led them yet further up the mountain-side, and seemed to promise nothing but a long and tedious tramp.

They kept on until it split, as the main ravine had done, into two smaller passages, neither of which seemed to be worth following, as they were choked up by stones and shrubbery.

"I reckon we have come to the end of our tether," remarked the guide, as he seated himself on a rock to rest.

"We ought not to give it up yet," answered the young man. "If there is any chance at all, we should take that chance."

"It's no use, Jack. If the Apaches had come up this way, they must have brought their horses with them, and we would surely have seen some sign of them before now. I tell you we're at the end of our tether, and we had better turn back."

"Only a little further," pleaded Jack. "If you will take that chute, I will take this one, and we surely have time enough to look into them a little way. It is just possible that we might find something."

"Not even possible, it seems to me; but you shall have your way. Don't go far, my boy, and be sure to meet me here inside of an hour."

Jack promised to obey these instructions, and started off.

At the outset, the course he had taken was decidedly unpromising.

It was, as has been said, choked up with stones and shrubbery; but when he came to look at it more closely, it seemed to him as if the stones might have been placed there by human hands.

The arrangement of them was not entirely natural, and the pile was only at one spot, the course beyond that point being clear and easy to travel.

Looking a little more closely, Jack perceived that a twig of one of the overhanging shrubs had been crushed, and lately crushed, under a stone.

It was easy enough to reason that out.

The stone had fallen upon the twig, and there was no place from which it could have dropped naturally to the position it occupied.

Consequently, it must have been placed there, and by human hands.

Jack was convinced that men had been there before him quite recently, and he surmounted the obstruction and hurried up the pass.

He would have called to Hark Sarpy and informed him of the discovery, but his leader had gone off in another direction.

He had not gone far when his conviction became a certainty, as he found there not only the droppings but the tracks of horses.

It was apparent then that the Apaches, if they had preceded him there, had thrown up that barrier of stones at the mouth of the pass, and had not cared to hide their tracks any more.

The pains they had taken to cover the trail thus far was truly marvelous, and they were doubtless glad when the necessity of caution, as they believed, no longer existed.

When he had gone a little further he discovered a small scrap of muslin adhering to a thorny cactus, and immediately pounced upon and made a prize of it.

This was the best evidence he had yet had that he was on the right trail, and he eagerly pushed forward, sure that he would have a report to bring back that would gladden the heart of Hark Sarpy.

Further on the little pass grew narrower and deeper, and began to tend downward pretty sharply, the sides changing from stony declivities to walls of rock, like a miniature copy of some of the big canyons he had seen.

Darkness seemed to come on him when he got between those walls of rock; but he looked at his watch, and judged that he would have time enough to rejoin his leader within the time agreed upon.

Therefore he decided to push forward a little further.

The pass made a short bend to the right, and directly beyond the bend he saw light ahead.

Jack had listened attentively to all that Hark Sarpy had said concerning the location of the Apaches, stronghold, and his conclusion was that he had come upon it from the rear or the flank and was about to emerge where he would have a chance to overlook it.

Hitherto he had advanced with a reasonable degree of caution, looking out carefully for enemies; but his caution deserted him when he saw the light ahead.

Indeed, there seemed to be no further occasion for caution, as the narrow and walled pass could not conceal an Apache.

It would be time enough to be careful when he should reach the end and see the view that was promised him there.

He did reach the end, and at the same time came to the end of his expedition.

An exclamation of joy and amazement burst from his lips as he stood there and looked down at the scene below him; but it was instantly choked off.

Two Apache warriors who were standing guard there had doubtless heard the footsteps of the rash intruder, and had concealed themselves behind the rocks at the mouth of the pass.

As soon as he emerged they seized him, and in a few seconds he was disarmed and bound.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EVA, THE APACHE.

AFTER Eva Sarpy was taken with Ephraim Cronkhite to the horse camp near Bella Vista, her life was not as pleasant as she might have wished it to be.

Although Carroh was mainly good-humored and treated her kindly, he had become distasteful to her, and she had actually contracted a dislike for him.

Her recent association with the Dunning family, tending as it did, to awaken old ideas and stir the white blood in her veins, had made a difference in her which she did not appreciate until she voluntarily returned to the Apaches.

She then saw so much in a short time that was repugnant to her, that she probably regretted having broken the bonds that recently attached her to civilization.

When Manuel triumphantly burst through the camp on his captured horse, her elation at his success was such that she did not dare to let it be known.

When the Apaches finally came down from Bella Vista, disgusted and gloomy because of their failure and their losses, she did not sympathize with them in the least, but simply mounted her pony when she was ordered to do so, and listlessly rode away with them.

She did not fail to give the valley a last, long, lingering look, as if she regretted leaving it.

Carroh made it a point to ride with her after they got into the hills, and was quite gallant in his way; but his good manners made no impression upon Eva, who answered him very briefly when she spoke at all.

She was so curt and so cool that he abandoned the effort to please her, and rode off with his comrades.

He did not come in contact with her again until the episode occurred that was witnessed by her father from his concealment near the Apache camp.

It was to be expected that the savages, after they had been so badly used by the white people at Bella Vista, would wish to wreak their spite upon their one prisoner.

That he had voluntarily put himself in their power was a circumstance not to be considered. The more fool he, and the more lucky they.

The plea of insanity that was entered in his behalf by Eva, though temporarily allowed, failed to find favor with them, especially as the counsel for the defense was not above the suspicion of sympathizing with the whites.

The sport began shortly after they had entered the range on the other side of the valley.

Poor Cronkhite was compelled to tramp after his captor, tied to the tail of a horse, and much nearer to the heels of the animal than was agreeable to him.

At the first halt he expressed himself freely concerning this harsh treatment, but only succeeded in amusing the Apaches.

When he was tied up, he proceeded to deliver an oration in his usual style, in which he expatiated upon his own wrongs as well as those of the poor red-men.

This was such a delight to his captors that one of them stepped up to him with a sharp knife, and with a quick cut shaved off one of his ears close to the head.

He howled as he felt the pain and missed the ear, and his success as a shrieker induced them to shave off another ear, so that they might elicit another howl; but he prudently refrained from obliging them, and submitted to his sufferings with a moan.

Eva flared up at this outrage, and loudly protested against it, renewing her assertion that the prisoner was a crazy man and should be treated kindly.

The head chief rather contemptuously informed her that the Apaches had spoken about the man to their white friend, Zeke Stebbins, who knew him, and who assured them that he was no more crazy than himself.

At that time they tortured the Apostle of Peace no more, saving him up, as it were, for their amusement on the way.

His wounds were allowed to bleed and heal as they might, and he was again compelled to plod forward over the roughness of the route at the heels of a horse.

The last act of that drama, though not the ending of the act, was witnessed by Hark Sarpy.

Eva's hasty endeavor to put an end to the sport was stopped by Carroh and another warrior, and it was her Indian lover who forced her away from the scene and told her plainly that she must not interfere any further with the amusements of the Apaches.

She would have given him a piece of her mind then and there, if it had not been that Hark Sarpy's two shots startled and terrified the camp and compelled Carroh to hasten from her.

Then came the bugle call and the sudden flight of the Apaches, and Eva was mounted and hurried away in the advance, so that she did not see the final deed of spite and cruelty that made an end of the unfortunate prisoner.

She missed him during the journey that followed, and could easily guess at the fate that had befallen him.

When the young chief came to her again, and began to mingle airs of proprietorship with his Indian gallantry, she received him very coldly, and reproached him for the rudeness with which he had prevented her from having her wish.

Carroh informed her in effect that she was a little goose, and that it was her duty to do as she was bid, without pretending to have a will of her own.

Her short and sharp reply was the equivalent in Apache to the American girl's, "I hate you," and it ruffled the feathers of the young chief.

"You have too much white blood in you yet," he sternly rejoined. "I will take you to my mother, and she will find a way to get you clear of it."

It might be good Apache style for a young man to threaten a maiden with her mother-in-law before she was married; but Eva did not admire that style, and she was not a bit afraid of Carroh or his relatives.

She did not belong to him yet, and she need not belong to him unless she chose to, and at that time she did not choose to be controlled or dictated to by him.

These strained relations, to use the language of the diplomatists, continued during the journey to the mountains south of the Gila, and it was apparent to all the Apaches, as well as to those who were most nearly interested, that Eva and Carroh were "two."

When they reached that wild and romantic region, the girl became so absorbed in the intricacies of their travel and the proceedings of her companions, that she probably gave no more thought to the matters that had lately troubled her.

It was not the first time she had visited the retreat for which the Apaches were heading; but on this occasion there was believed to be a hot and relentless pursuit, and they took the utmost possible pains to cover the trail, carefully removing or effacing the minutest thing that might give a hint of their passage.

They emerged from a narrow pass upon a scene of wonderful beauty.

Below them was a broad and nearly circular basin, covered with tall trees and rich grass, and provided with a small lake which afforded plenty of water.

The descent to this retreat was somewhat difficult; but when it was reached there was an assurance of both plenty and peace, as the stronghold was impregnable.

It was surrounded by lofty and apparently inaccessible mountains, the only openings being a canyon toward the east, which was closed by an impassable cliff, and the narrow crevice through which the Apaches had entered, which could be easily guarded if it should ever be discovered.

Here the savages proposed to rest, at least until the pursuit should be abandoned, when they might hope to work for the recovery of their women and children, most of whom were in the enemy's country—if those could be called enemies who had fed and cared for them through a hard winter.

The first thing to disturb their security was the sound of a shot near the cliff at the head of the canyon.

No guard had been posted there, as it was not believed that any was needed; but it was known that one of the band had gone thither, and there was a natural curiosity to learn the meaning of the shot.

When the few warriors who strolled down to the cliff could discover no sign there of their

comrade or of any other person, they concluded that they had been mistaken in the direction of the shot, and went away.

When the missing man did not return to the camp, and his disappearance was unaccounted for, they made a more careful search, which resulted in the discovery of his body at the foot of the cliff.

It was then supposed that he had accidentally fallen over, and his rifle had been discharged by the fall.

When a man was let down by a rawhide rope, and the body of their comrade was hauled up, it was discovered that he had been shot through the head, and that his rifle had not been discharged.

Then the mysterious death shots that startled their camp at the north occurred to them and stirred up their superstitious souls, and gloom settled down upon them.

If their number should continue to be reduced by such casualties, they would soon be unable to defend even that impregnable fortress.

The next disturbance was caused by the capture of a white man who was trying to sneak through the narrow pass, and this at once raised their spirits and gave them fresh hope.

It was then evident to them that they were pursued and pestered by mortal enemies instead of supernatural foes, and of such they were not afraid.

Eva was quickly made aware of this important capture, and was there to see the prisoner when he was brought into camp, wishing to know whether he was one of the Dunning family.

He proved to be a person whom she had never seen before, but at the same time a person in whom she could far more easily take an interest than in Captain Dunning or Bob or either of their hired hands.

During her residence with the Dunnings she had never met such a white man as Jack Bunn.

If she had, she might not have felt the impulse that caused her to return to the Apaches.

He was young, handsome, bright, intelligent, and in every way attractive, impressing her with a sense of his superiority, and filling her heart with pity as she thought of his impending fate.

If there be such a thing as love at first sight, that must have been the sensation which animated Eva as she gazed on the young prisoner.

She followed him with her eyes as he was led into captivity, and he could not help perceiving the interest with which she regarded him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNTRUE INTERPRETER.

JACK BUNN'S capture was effected so suddenly and so neatly, putting any attempt at resistance utterly out of the question, that he was unable fully to realize his position until he was brought down into the Apache camp.

It was yet light enough, though the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, for him to perceive the beauty of the place and its resources as a safe retreat.

He expected no mercy at the hands of his captors, but felt that his fate was sealed as soon as he was disarmed and bound.

The mutilation and torture and subsequent death of Ephraim Cronkhite had taught him all he needed to learn concerning the ways of the Apaches with their prisoners.

If the Apostle of Peace, who had voluntarily put himself in their power, and who might fairly have been regarded as a person deprived of reason, had suffered so severely; what could be expected to happen to him, a sane man and an avowed enemy, who had been caught as he was trying secretly to effect an entrance into their stronghold?

Nothing but death, and death with what, if he could then have been in a jocular mood, he might have mentioned as "all the trimmings."

As for a rescue, he scarcely gave that a second thought, and it was surely far from his hopes.

It was evident to him at once that the fortress was impregnable, with but one opening by which it could be approached, and that one he had tried to his sorrow.

His experience of that passage told him that his friends could not possibly get through it alive, and his only fear was that they might find his trail and push forward to their own destruction.

There was one gleam of pleasure to him in his captivity, though it could not be called a ray of comfort, and that was found in the presence of Eva and the knowledge that she was taking an interest in him.

He knew that she must be Hark Sarpy's daughter, the girl who had gone back to the Apaches, and his heart went out to her in pity for that great mistake.

He perceived, also, that she had a beauty of her own which was very fascinating to him, in spite of the air of wildness which her wild life had given her.

When she stood and gazed at him as he passed with her dark eyes full of sympathy and sorrow there came over him a feeling of longing which

the certainty of his fate compelled him to stifle.

The prisoner was brought to the camp, where the head chief questioned him.

As Jack understood no Apache, and the chief could speak no English, Eva was pressed into service as an interpreter.

She willingly accepted the position, as it was possible that she might turn her interpreting to the benefit of the white man.

At least it would give her a good chance to see more of him, to speak to him, and to listen to his words.

The questions of the head chief were put with the view of ascertaining what white men were in the vicinity, how many of them were soldiers, where they were located, what their intentions were, whether they had made any guess at the hiding-place of the Apaches, and such other points concerning them as it might be to the advantage of the savages to know.

As soon as the young man perceived the drift of the questioning, he resolved that he would not injure his friends by giving any information that might serve the purpose of his foes.

In any event he must expect a painful death, and it was not worth while to give the savages any further advantage than they would have in the possession of his person.

In spite of his refusal to give the replies that were wanted, Eva answered for him that he was one of a large body of white men, among whom were many soldiers; but that he had nothing to do with them or their purposes, having merely come to look at the country and to hunt.

She went on to say for him that these white men were so far from guessing at the hiding-place of the Apaches that they did not even suspect the presence of any such people in those mountains.

Jack Bunn had said nothing of the kind, and it seemed to him, as it must also have seemed to the Apaches, judging by the length of her speeches, that she was making more of his few words than he had put into them.

But there was nobody there who was able to detect her in any imposition, and in translating from one language into another words are apt to be multiplied, so that the translator may be sure to give the full meaning.

The head chief was not satisfied with Eva's last answer, as it seemed to lack the element of truth.

"Tell the white man," said he, "that he is lying to us. We know that those soldiers have come to look for us, and we want to know where they are and what they mean to do. He had better not tell any more lies."

Eva took this warning to herself, and proceeded to give the white man a caution on her own account.

"You must make more talk," she said, "after I speak to you, and you must not look at me so much. Don't look at me at all, if you can help it."

In spite of the gravity of the situation, Jack yielded to the impulse of answering that he could not help looking at her, and this brought a blush to her cheeks.

Then he blurted out a number of words, which Eva translated to suit herself, without the least regard for what had really been said.

"The white man says that the chief has guessed right. The soldiers have come to look for the Apaches, but do not know where to find them. When the sun rises he will be able to point out to the chief the direction of their camp, and to tell him how far it is from here."

This was important information, and the chief was glad to perceive that the white man had weakened.

It was quite reasonable that he should wish to wait for sunrise, so that he could get his "bearings" and make his information more accurate.

"Tell the white man," said he, "that we will wait for sunrise."

This was what Eva had been working for.

If the young man's life could be spared for the present, something might be done to save him.

She told him of the reprieve, but in her own style, without making any allusion to what had led to it.

He seemed to be more interested in her than in the good news she gave him.

"I wish I could speak to you," he said. "I have something to tell you about yourself that you ought to know."

"You will see me again," she answered shortly, as she turned away.

Then she informed the chief that the white man had again promised to tell them something in the morning.

This was good news for the Apaches, who were willing to delay the death of the prisoner, until they could worm out of him what he knew.

At the same time they had no respect for a man who could betray his friends, and were not disposed to treat him leniently.

He was taken a little way aside, and four stakes were driven into the ground where he was laid upon his back on the grass.

To the stakes his feet and hands were attach-

and by thongs, and were stretched until the tension was very painful.

There they left him, as there was not the faintest possibility of his getting loose without help.

To the painfulness of his position was added the torture of night insects, which promised to make the brief remainder of his life a misery to him.

Night came, and it happened to be a night of intense darkness.

The Apaches, after their supper and their smoke, stretched themselves out on the ground and slept, without the needless precaution of setting a watch, as the only point of possible danger was well guarded.

Jack Bunn was unable to sleep.

The irritating insects fed upon him at their pleasure, and threatened to close his eyes and make his face something hideous to behold.

His mind, moreover, was agitated by thoughts of Eva, who had seemed to take an interest in him, and to whom he wished to tell the story of her own people.

She had promised that he should see her again; but when?

Would it be when he was brought out to die, and would she come to gloat over his death agonies, after the manner of the Apache squaws?

The long hours of the night dragged on, and darkness of the deepest had settled down on the camp, and nothing was to be heard but the hum of the insects and the whirr of the night birds' wings.

At last he began to despair.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FOR LOVE'S SAKE.

EVA had not forgotten her promise to the white prisoner.

More than that, she had not forgotten her desire to see him and her intention of aiding him.

When the sentiment of first love, or whatever it may have been, was once awakened in her, she had an object in life, and all her powers of mind and body were directed toward its attainment.

Carroh had never inspired her with the faintest spark of such a feeling, nor had Bob Dunning.

Of course the grand idea was that the white man must be saved, and to that end her first exertions had been made, securing for him a reprieve until morning.

As concerned this prisoner no suspicion of sympathy rested on her; she was free, and could go where she pleased and act as she pleased; there was no guard at the camp, and the deep darkness favored her plans.

She laid down in her usual place, and pretended to sleep until she was sure that the Apaches were all wrapped in slumber.

Then she arose as silently as a ghost, and glided around the camp in the darkness, with no more noise than the night birds made, to the place where the white prisoner was tethered to the ground.

She found him as if by instinct, and the first intimation he had of her presence was when something soft settled down beside him and brushed away the annoying insects.

"Hush-sh!" she whispered, as he uttered a faint exclamation. "You must not speak or try to speak. I lied to the chief, and told him that you would give him some good words in the morning, so that he would save your life until then."

"And you said that I should see you again," whispered Jack, "and you have come to me, and I want to tell you—"

"Hush-sh! You must tell me nothing. Speak not at all, or they will hear you, and will find us both, and you will die in the morning. Do what I tell you to do, and say nothing."

She cut with a sharp knife the thongs that confined his feet and hands, and assisted him to rise.

After letting him stand there a few minutes to rest his strained limbs, she took him by the hand and led him away.

It was so dark that Jack could scarcely see his hand before him; but he could feel the hand that led him, and he submitted himself implicitly to Eva's guidance, involuntarily imitating her movements, and stepping almost as softly as she did.

Why she had taken such an interest in him as to run the risk to set him free, was the question that mainly perplexed the young man.

Had she quickly tired of the Apaches after her return to them, or had she by some chance discovered that her father was alive and seeking her?

She was surely putting herself in great peril, and it seemed to Jack that a favorable issue of the undertaking was quite unlikely.

He longed to speak to her and beg her to enlighten him on these points; but she had as yet given him no permission to talk, and he prudently held his peace.

Eva acted as if she knew what she was about, pursuing a direct course which she had doubtless marked out at the start, and turning neither to the right nor to the left, except to avoid trees and other obstructions.

She either could see in the darkness as wild

animals can, or possessed an instinctive knowledge of the proper course and the best way to keep it.

Silently and surely she led the young man on, until a thicker chunk of blackness that rose before them informed him that they had reached a portion of the heights that surrounded the basin.

"They can't hear us now," she said, softly, and Jack took this as an intimation that he might speak to her.

"Where are you going to?" he asked. "What do you mean to do?"

"I am going to take you back to your own people," she lightly answered, as if the task were one of no difficulty.

"But how can we get out of this place? It is impossible to go through the pass where I was captured."

"I know another way. It is a way that I found out when I was here before, and I do not believe that the Apaches know it. It is so dark now that I can find it without any trouble."

She spoke as if she could find it more easily in the darkness than in the daylight; but to Jack it seemed impossible that she should find it at all.

"It was dark when I first came here," she suggested, by way of explanation.

Eva started right ahead into the chunk of blackness, and began to climb the height, Jack following her as well as he could.

This was no easy matter for him, as he had no other power of sight or her knowledge of the ascent; but he climbed his best, assisting himself by grasping small trees and points of rock, and every now and then directed and encouraged by a soft voice ahead of him, which helped him on mightily.

How the girl managed to find any sort of a route by which she could climb that rugged and precipitous height in the utter darkness was amazing to Jack Bunn; but he could not give much thought to the problem, as all his exertions were needed to follow her.

On and up she clambered, pausing now and then, not for her own sake, but to warn her companion against dangerous places, and to bid him rest, which he was glad enough to do, as his strained limbs were in poor condition for any kind of travel.

Still higher they went, until it seemed to Jack that they must be far above the camp of the Apaches, and then he heard Eva calling him as usual, but did not know what had become of her.

She reached out her hand and led him into a cleft in the rock, where she bade him sit down and rest.

He could not see her, but knew that she had seated herself near him, and the knowledge delighted him.

"We are safe here," said Eva. "They can't find us now. They won't think of following us this way—at least, not before morning."

"And now," responded Jack, "I can tell you what you ought to know. You said that you were going to take me back to my people. You are also going to your own people—you are going to meet your father."

"What father? Is it the man who took me away from the Apaches?"

"No. It is your own father, who lost you when you were a little child, and who has followed you down here. His name is Hark Sarpy."

"Do you mean Hark the Hater?" she fiercely demanded.

"Some men give him that name."

"He is a bad and bloody man. He has pursued my people like wolves, and has killed many of them."

"The Apaches are not your people, Eva, and why should he not kill them? They murdered your mother and your baby brother, and carried you away, and he has been seeking you ever since."

"I don't know him," was her short answer.

"It was his home that the Apaches attacked when they left you below and went up on the hill to fight. Your sister is there."

Eva appeared to take no interest at all in what he was telling her.

"I don't know them," she said. "I am not going to them. I am going with you."

This evident distinction and frank admission prompted the young man to question her further.

"I supposed," he said, "that you might have heard of your father and your sister, and that it was because of them that you were willing to leave the Apaches."

"No," she plainly replied. "It was because of you."

Boldly as she said this, there was that in her tone which suggested a blush, and Jack was delighted again.

"Were you not tired of the Apaches?" he asked.

"Yes, I was sorry that I went back to them. They were not the same. They would never let me have my own way any more. They killed a white man when I begged them to be good to him, and they meant to kill you. They would have killed you if I had not taken you away from them."

"Yes, Eva, you have saved my life."

"Not yet; but I am trying to save it. You know my name—what is yours?"

"My name is Jack."

"Come, Jack: we must try to get further away from the Apaches. I have gone as far as I know, and we must feel our way until daylight."

Eva was well enough acquainted with the route to know that the cleft in the rock which they had entered would take them through the heights which they had partly climbed; but that was all she knew about it, except that every step would take them further from the Apaches.

She walked forward wearily, feeling the sides of the crevice with her hands, and bidding Jack keep close to her, a command which he most willingly obeyed.

It was necessary to use caution, as the unknown path might suddenly break away, and a careless step might precipitate them into a fissure or over a cliff; but no step could be lighter or truer than Eva's, and they reached the end of the split without accident.

They knew when they had emerged from the mouth of the passage by a fresh breeze that met them, seeming as if it drew through a valley.

They also knew it by the discovery of a steep descent directly before them, over which even the sharp-sighted girl nearly slipped.

As they did not know whither it led, and could not judge in the darkness what course was most likely to take them to the white men's camp, it was deemed best not to adventure the descent, but to wait there for daylight.

The wait was not a long one, as it was late at night when Eva freed the prisoner, and their progress in climbing the hill and passing through the cleft had been very slow.

By the gray light of dawn they perceived that they were on the side of one hill and facing another, the opening between them tending toward the south.

The descent was not difficult when they had daylight for it, and the route between the two hills was easy enough.

When day fairly broke, and the point where the sun rose was visible, their course was yet plainer and easier.

"It's all right, now," said Jack. "I know which way to go to find our friends, and as soon as we come to a break that leads off toward the east, we will follow it."

In the course of time they found the break they wanted, and went forward cheerfully and hopefully, most of the time hand in hand.

The day proved to be clear and bright, and in the morning sunshine, Jack Bunn saw new beauties in the radiant face of Eva, who had not only periled herself to save his life, but had freely admitted that she had done so for his sake alone.

Much to the young man's amazement, the lead which they were then following brought them directly to the heap of stones that veiled the entrance to the place in which he had been captured.

"I know where we are now!" he joyfully cried.

"And so do I," said Eva.

"All we have to do is to go right ahead, and we will soon reach the camp of our friends. Come on, Eva!"

Hardly had he spoken when an Apache appeared before them.

They were helpless, as Jack was entirely unarmed, and Eva had only the knife with which she had cut his thongs, while the savage carried all his weapons.

He chuckled as he planted himself in the path before them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A HATER NO MORE.

HARK SARPY returned to the junction of the two routes which he and his friend had taken, having soon discovered that his own course led him to nothing.

He did not find Jack there, and waited for him, annoyed and perplexed, until the hour agreed upon had passed.

Then he was forced to the conclusion that the young man had started to return to the camp without waiting for him, and, as night was coming on, he took the same direction.

When he reached the camp, he learned that all the members of the scouting party had come in except Jack, of whom nothing had been seen.

It was apparent to him that his young friend must have lost his way, or had met with an accident, or might even have fallen into the hands of the Apaches.

He blamed himself severely for not having gone in search of Jack when he missed him at the place of meeting; but it was then too late, considering the darkness of the night, to go back into the mountains, and he was compelled to wait for morning.

He had taken a great fancy to Jack, whom he regarded as a bright young man, true and brave, and ready of resource, and his anxiety about his favorite made him restless during the night, and aroused him at an early hour in the morning.

Before there were any signs of day he set out with Shawnee Jim and Manuel, leaving Captain

Dunning to follow later with the soldiers and the others.

He had then come to the conclusion, having talked the matter over with his friends, that Jack Bunn had found his way into the Apache den, and had not been permitted to leave it.

It was therefore necessary to follow his trail, find the way by which he had got in, and rush an overwhelming force upon the Apaches.

Of course it was easier to form this plan than to carry it out; but Hark Sarpy was determined to do his utmost to rescue his young friend, or avenge his death.

Before he reached the spot where he and Jack had separated, he ordered his two companions to halt, as he intended to go forward alone.

"I know the route the boy took," said he, "and I think I can follow his trail better alone. So I will make a little scout, and will come back to you shortly. Don't stir from here unless you hear something."

He went on quietly, and with the greatest possible caution, naturally suspecting that if Jack had found his way into the Apache stronghold, the savages would be on the lookout for more white men in that quarter.

It was well that he moved cautiously, as he had hardly come in sight of the place where he parted with Jack, when he saw something else.

This was only a feather, scarcely distinguishable from the foliage near it; but Hark Sarpy at once knew it to be part of an Apache head-dress.

He dropped down behind a convenient rock, and waited and watched.

The Indian was evidently waiting for something or somebody, and he would wait for the Indian.

The truth was that the Apaches, discovering the escape of their prisoner, were also speedily made aware of the fact that Eva had assisted him and disappeared with him.

Unable to find any trace of the fugitives at the time, or to guess how they had got out of the basin, they sent scouts through the only outlet that was known to them, to look for the prisoner and the traitor.

The Apache upon whom Sarpy had nearly stumbled was of course one of those scouts.

Hark saw the feather move, and was confirmed in his suspicion as to what was under it.

Directly the head and shoulders of the owner of the feather were raised, and he peered about and listened, as if he heard some distant sound.

Sarpy listened intently, and was almost sure that he heard voices in the distance.

It was then broad daylight, and the sun was up and shining brightly, and Hark was getting tired of waiting, when he was quite sure that he heard voices.

The Apache scout subsided into his concealment with a grunt of satisfaction, and the white man kept close behind his rock.

Down an incline at the left came two young people, and the Hater could scarcely restrain himself when he perceived that they were Jack and Eva.

They halted at a few paces from the Apache, and Hark watched intently.

He could not suppose that the scout in ambush would kill either of them, as their capture, if they had really escaped, would please the Apaches vastly better, and that could be easily effected, as Jack was unarmed.

It was quickly made evident that the case was one of escape, as the Apache rose suddenly before them, and Eva uttered a cry of alarm, while Jack picked up a stone as the only available weapon.

The savage was about to advance upon the young man, when a bullet from Sarpy's rifle went spinning through his head and put an end to all his earthly efforts.

The shot produced a sudden change of scene.

As Hark Sarpy rose and showed himself to the young people, Apaches came running down the little ravine, and at the same time Manuel and Shawnee Jim hurried up to join their leader.

"Clear out, you two!" he shouted as he pointed the way down the glen to Jack and Eva.

They ran away, and he settled down behind his rock to wait for the oncoming Apaches.

As they came in view his rifle cracked again and again, and each shot told.

Manuel and Shawnee Jim came running up to him, and in a few minutes there was no longer any fight left in the Apaches.

If there were any more of them near at hand, they did not show themselves.

Jack Bunn, who had only gone far enough to see that Eva was safe, hastened back to his friend as speedily as possible.

He found Manuel anxious to enter the pass which he had explored to his sorrow, and Hark Sarpy restraining him.

"Don't try it!" cried the young man. "That is where I went in, and I was gobbled up so quick that it made my head swim. It is a very narrow pass, and one man could keep out an army while his ammunition lasted."

"How did you get out?" demanded Hark.

"Not that way. By a way that could never be worked in the daytime and could never be struck at night. Eva found it for me from the

inside; but that was another matter. It was she who saved my life. Come and see her."

Hark Sarpy was glad enough to do this, and he accompanied the young man down the path, leaving Shawnee Jim and Manuel to watch for more Apaches.

They found Eva seated on a rock, and Jack took her by the hand and led her to Hark.

"This is your father, Eva," said he.

"I don't know him," she briefly answered, and there was no look of recognition or of awakened affection in her face.

"And I would not have known you," said her father; "but I am sure that you are my lost child. Never mind, little one; we will get acquainted with each other before long, and I shall not lose you again."

"I don't know you," quietly observed the girl; "but I know Jack."

"Oh, you know Jack, hey? It don't seem to have taken you long to make his acquaintance. Well, I am glad that you know Jack and that you have done him such a great service. As you and the young lady are on such good terms, my boy, you had better bring her along."

Jack did bring her along, and she went with him willingly enough.

Hark Sarpy called in Shawnee Jim and Manuel, and followed the young couple down the glen.

He had found his child and recovered her, succeeding in the object to which he had been true through so many years of his life, but she was not his daughter yet—she did not know him, and took no interest in him—and that must have been a torture even to his stout heart.

But he controlled his feelings, as he was accustomed to do, and was content to wait for her affection.

It was easy to see that just then the young man whose life she had saved was all in all to her, and it was to be expected that Jack Bunn would prevent her from wishing to go back to the Apaches.

Her father only hoped that the two might go through life together as they were then walking together.

Shortly they met Captain Dunning and his son, who were overjoyed at seeing Eva and delighted at the safe return of Jack.

A little further down the mountain Captain Lang was met with a portion of his command, and there were more rejoicings and congratulations, with more story to tell.

The officer, when assured that the hiding-place of the Apaches was discovered, was anxious to go up and capture them; but Hark Sarpy and Jack Bunn succeeded in persuading him out of that idea, convincing him that he would lose more than he could gain by the attempt.

"For my part," said the Hater, "I am not in the humor for worrying them any more. I have killed my last Apache, unless it should be in self-defense. If they will let me alone hereafter, I will let them alone."

"What shall we do, then?" demanded Captain Lang.

"Just go away. I have recovered my lost child, and all I want now is to take her home."

"Home it is, then. I shall not have a bad report to make, as the expedition has turned out well, though I must confess that little credit is due to the military portion of the party."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I SMELL 'PACHE."

HOME it was, though Captain Lang was not entirely satisfied to make the start until after he had closely questioned Jack Bunn and Eva.

Eva was not disposed to wish any more harm to the Apaches, who had been kind to her in their way, and she declared that she could give no information, except that it would be useless for the white men to try to get into their hiding-place.

Jack Bunn assured the officer that it would be impossible for him to find the route by which he had left the basin in the dark.

If it should by chance be found, it could not be followed at night, and in the daytime it would be quite impossible, as the Indians could pick off the invaders as fast as they appeared.

It was decidedly his opinion that the Apache stronghold was impregnable, and Captain Lang, after listening to a minute account of the escape, was forced to the same conclusion.

With this, the knowledge that he could no longer depend upon his irregular allies had much to do.

Hark Sarpy and Captain Dunning were satisfied with the recovery of Eva, and the former had declared that he was no longer a "Hater," and the others were not disposed to "tackle" the Apaches any further.

Captain Lang well knew that without their assistance his soldiers would not be of much use in those mountains.

"We can afford to let them go," said he, "and give the Mexicans a chance at them. If my men have killed no Apaches, it is a consolation to reflect that no Apaches have killed them."

Home it was, and the combined regulars and irregulars packed their belongings, mounted their horses, and started on the return journey.

Hark Sarpy was happy, Jack Bunn was very gay, and Eva was more than contented.

Manuel was the only one of the party who cast longing glances backward at the mountains, grieving because he had not been able to slaughter more Apaches.

A horse was provided for Eva, which she persisted in mounting man-fashion, her reasonable excuse being that there was no side-saddle in the party.

She also persisted in riding with Jack Bunn, and it was the pride and glory of that young man to be permitted to act as her escort.

To this arrangement her father made no objection, but plainly showed his approval of it.

"She is still an Apache," he said to Captain Lang. "She has no recollection of her family or her former life, and she can't have cared much for the Dunnings, as she was so ready to leave them."

"She saved the young fellow's life," observed the officer.

"Yes, and that was because she had taken a sudden fancy for him. She is an impulsive little savage—no doubt of that. This fancy will be the means of civilizing her, and when she is civilized she will be my child again. The scheme is working to suit me very well."

If association with Jack Bunn was to civilize the girl, she seemed to be getting civilized very fast, as they stuck to each other like a pair of burrs.

Jack had a great deal to say to her in addition to matters that specially concerned himself and her.

To no other person could she have listened so patiently when he endeavored to recall her to her past life and to interest her in her family and friends.

He told her of the murder of her mother and her baby brother by the Apaches, and how her father, returning to his home, had found it in ashes, his wife dead in the ruins, the mutilated body of the babe near by, his youngest daughter stolen from him, and the elder only escaped by her absence from the scene of destruction.

He went on to describe the sufferings of her father and his long and tireless search for his lost child, which had at last ended happily, though as yet she did not seem to know him or care for him.

As Jack had heard only the outlines of the sad story from his friend, he was obliged to call him in to supply the details, and thus the father began to get acquainted with his daughter, and the work of restoring her to civilization progressed favorably.

Hark told her of her mother and her sister, and brought up incidents of her life as a child that made her eyes open wide, and produced the beginnings of a remembrance that was sure to grow.

Then he told her of his pleasant home at Bella Vista, and of the sister who had given her up for dead, but would welcome her as one returned to life.

"She will never care for me," objected Eva. "because I am an Apache."

"You are not an Apache, my child," answered her father.

"I suppose I am not; but I had lived with them so long that I thought I belonged to them, and after I went back to them I would never have got away if it hadn't been for Jack."

"I am sure that I would never have got away," observed that young gentleman, "if it hadn't been for Eva."

This was quite satisfactory to Hark Sarpy, who declared that he hoped that neither of them would get away from him.

During the first day's march the returning party met with supplies of provisions and ammunition which Captain Lang had directed to be sent after him.

The ammunition was not needed, but the provisions were thankfully received, and the irregulars received enough to take them to their homes.

After they had crossed the Gila they continued up the north bank of the river until they reached the San Carlos, when Captain Lang and the soldiers kept on toward their post, and Hark Sarpy and his party started to follow the valley up to Bella Vista.

Those who were mounted on army horses kept them, promising to send them back by the soldiers who had been left at Sarpy's place.

During the journey thus far Manuel had kept casting longing glances backward in the direction of the mountains they had left, as if his mission had not been fulfilled.

After they started up the valley he seemed to have abandoned the hope of inflicting any more damage upon the Apaches he had followed so far.

He had, in fact, abandoned that idea; but it was only to take up with another one, which stuck to him persistently in spite of the incredulity and occasional ridicule of his companions.

"I smell 'Pache!" was his new craze.

No Apaches had been visible since they started to return, nor was there the slightest reason to suspect the presence of any hostile Indians anywhere about them.

Hark Sarpy, whose sense of smell as regarded

Apaches was considered as good as anybody's, declared that his nose reported nothing to him.

The Mexican continued to insist that he smelt Apaches, and expressed the opinion that the party had been followed ever since they left the mountains south of the Gila.

He was asked how he supposed it to be possible that some Apaches, or even one Apache, could have followed them from below without being discovered, when they had traveled through reaches over which they could see their trail for a long distance backward, and no person had been visible in that direction.

This he explained by asserting that while they traveled by day and rested at night, their pursuer or pursuers could travel by night and rest by day, thus keeping near them but out of their sight.

His explanation and idea were both treated as chimerical by his companions; but he was not to be argued out of them.

As the party proceeded up the valley and approached Bella Vista, the Mexican's mania increased until he became very restless.

"I smell 'Pache stronger'n ever," said he. "Dey's comin' closer."

This scent—or sentiment—took such a hold upon him, that, at the last nightly camp before reaching Bella Vista, he determined to do some investigating on his own account.

Accordingly, when the rest of the party had made themselves comfortable for the night, he mounted his horse and rode back on the trail.

He did not return until near morning, and then his horse was in poor condition for another day's travel; but he did not mind that.

What he minded was the failure of his attempt to discover anything to confirm his suspicions.

"Did you find any Apaches, Manuel?" demanded Hark.

"No. Smell 'em plenty, but couldn't find 'em."

"You gave them a good chance at you, though, if you followed the trail back, and if there had been any of them hanging around, I doubt if they would have let you come back to us."

Manuel suggested that perhaps he did not happen to be the man they wanted; but this suggestion was merely laughed at.

At noon they did not halt to prepare dinner, as they were then within sight of Bella Vista, where they might hope to get plenty of rest and good food.

Soon they reached the mouth of the pass at the southern side of the plateau, and there they were made joyful by the sight of two persons, a man and a woman, who stood at the edge of the cliff and waved to them.

Of course these were Mark Stepney and Hettie Sarpy, and their presence relieved their friends of any apprehensions they might have felt concerning the state of affairs at Bella Vista.

"Look at your sister, Eva!" cried Jack, as he pointed up at the cliff.

But Eva was looking sorrowfully at Jack.

"When you see my sister again," said she, "you will never look at me any more."

"I shall never care to look at anybody but you as long as I live," whispered Jack, and so that little matter was settled.

Hark Sarpy entered the pass first, closely followed by Manuel and Shawnee Jim.

Next came Jack and Eva, and Captain Dunning and his two ranch hands brought up the rear.

The Mexican whispered to his comrade that he smelt 'Pache stronger than ever; but there was no sign of the presence of any foe as they joyfully filed up the pass.

Suddenly the loud and sharp report of a rifle-shot near by startled the silent party.

Hark Sarpy reeled in his saddle, and would have fallen from his horse if Shawnee Jim had not dashed forward to his assistance.

Before the echo of the shot could die away, there was another report, this time from Manuel's rifle.

There was a heavy fall at the right of the ravine, and the Mexican dismounted and ran thither.

He returned quickly, dragging over the rocks the body of a half-naked and painted Indian.

"Told you I smelt 'Pache!" he triumphantly shouted.

Eva reined up her horse, and looked down at the dead savage.

"It is Carroh," she said.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WATCHERS AT BELLA VISTA.

AFTER the departure of Captain Lang and his party from Bella Vista Mark Stepney and the three women had three good reasons for rejoicing.

First, because they had been freed from a great peril; second, because they were well protected against another of the same kind; and third, because it was believed that the soldiers would overtake Hark Sarpy and his friends and make their pursuit of the Apaches a safe one.

Mrs. Dunning's hurt was found to be not much more than a flesh wound, though it was a

had one of its kind and promised a serious disfigurement of a face which had no beauty left to spoil.

Shawnee Kate, who was no slouch at rough surgery, dressed and bandaged it, and made the old lady so comfortable that she persisted in stirring about the house and trying to make herself useful.

In the house there were still plenty of provisions and other odds and ends, and the soldiers were so well treated that they were glad that they had got into such pleasant quarters.

They showed their gratitude by cheerfully doing everything they could be asked to do and more.

They buried the body of Barney Driscoll in a spot selected by Hettie, cleared up the remnants of the two Apache sieges, straightened out the scene of the dynamite explosion, turned the water back into the irrigating ditches, attended to the growing crops on the plateau, and in various ways made themselves useful about the house.

In short, they gained an enviable reputation at Bella Vista for good work and good nature.

After all things had been straightened up and cleaned out, there was little for the people on the plateau to do but to eat and drink and be as merry as they could while they awaited the return of their friends.

There was something more, as may be supposed, for Mark Stepney and Nettie Sarpy to do; but it was a matter in which they needed no assistance, and in which the presence of a third party would have been quite out of place.

From this it is reasonable to infer that they were very much in love with each other, and that is exactly what ailed them.

For the extension of this important business they made the best use of their opportunities and nothing could have advanced it better than the soft and balmy air of the days and evenings which they enjoyed together at Bella Vista.

As it was to be supposed that Hark Sarpy would have the assistance of Captain Lang and the soldiers in his pursuit of the Apaches and search for his child, it was also highly probable that he would succeed in his undertaking and bring Eva home to Bella Vista.

Therefore Mark Stepney was of the opinion that it would be proper for him to prepare her for that event by telling her the story of her sister's rescue from the Apaches and her return to them.

She was astonished and greatly agitated by this revelation, and was at first so incredulous that Mark was compelled to call on Mrs. Dunning to testify to the truth of his narrative. Mrs. Dunning not only confirmed his statements, but had so much to tell about Eva during her stay at the ranch, that Nettie actually for a while deserted the society of her lover for that of the old lady.

That is to say, he would have been deserted if he had not insisted upon staying and helping her listen.

Nettie was then agitated by fresh fears concerning her father.

She had not previously been aware of the dangerous nature of his occasional employment, having been led to believe that his long absences were caused by "business matters," with which she had not been accustomed to associate any idea of peril.

When she learned that he had been employed in hunting Apaches and seeking his lost child in remote and almost inaccessible regions, and that his absence from Bella Vista at that time was caused by a similar "matter of business," she became very uneasy about him, and feared that she would never see him again.

"Don't you be scared fur him, my dear," said Mrs. Dunning. "He's been in plenty o' scrapes afore now to which this here don't amount to so much as a picnic. He'll come back to you all right, and will bring your sister, and then you'll all be as happy as the Lord allows pore mortals fur to be."

Mark also assured her that there was nothing to fear, and after a while she became quite cheerful, looking forward eagerly to the arrival of her father and sister.

Though nothing then seemed to be more impossible than another Apache attack, the safety of Bella Vista was assured by regular reliefs of guards at each of the passes, and when the inmates of the stone house went to bed at night they felt that their sleep was secure.

There was also another sort of guard mounting which began on the second day following the departure of Captain Lang and his command, and that was performed by Mark Stepney and Hettie Sarpy.

They were in the habit of strolling along the western and southern edges of the plateau, the ostensible object of the stroll being to watch for and welcome their returning friends.

It must be admitted that they began the business rather early, and that some doubts were entertained as to the singleness of their purpose—in fact, it was supposed to have a sort of doubleness.

It must also be admitted that they gave to the business more time than was absolutely necessary, and occasionally conducted it at

hours when the darkness must have prevented them from seeing far.

But they doubtless supposed that they proved their sincerity by carrying on their rounds the field glass which Hark Sarpy had left at home, and which Mark ostentatiously displayed whenever they went out together.

Such intense devotion to business deserved success, and those persistent watchers were finally rewarded.

One day they went out together directly after dinner as usual, and proceeded to the southwest corner of the plateau, where they seated themselves in the shade and proceeded to watch each other—very closely.

It is evident that they were not watching anything else in particular just then, as a mounted party coming up the valley had nearly reached the mouth of the pass before they were discovered by those two sentinels.

Mark happened to look down and catch sight of them.

"Here they are, Hettie!" he cried eagerly as he jumped up. "Here comes your father with the rest of them!"

The next moment they were waving to the approaching party, and joyfully perceived that they were recognized.

"They are all there," said Mark, "and your sister Eva is with them. Take the glass, Hettie, and look at her."

While Hettie was looking through the glass, Mark espied Mrs. Dunning in the distance, and he ran and called her, bringing her almost breathless to the edge of the cliff.

By this time the party below had gone into the pass, and would soon be out of sight of the watchers above; but Mrs. Dunning saw her husband and her son and Eva, and she clasped her hands in thankfulness.

"Thank God for this great blessing!" she exclaimed. "They've all come back safe, and now we'll be so happy."

A shot down below interrupted the expression of joy, and before the watchers could determine what it meant there was another shot.

The scene that followed, though they could not fully understand it, was too plain to them and changed their delight to sudden grief.

They saw Hark Sarpy lifted from his horse, and knew that he was badly hurt.

They also saw the body of an Indian dragged down into the pass, and knew that the first shot they heard had been fired by some vengeful Apache.

"My father has been killed!" cried Hettie.

"He has been hit," said Mark; "but that is all we know about it yet. Let us hope for the best. They will be bringing him up here as soon as possible, and I will go over and meet them."

"I must go with you, Mark."

Mrs. Dunning, like the thoughtful soul that she was, hastened to the house to prepare a bed and bandages for the wounded man.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE END OF THE HATER.

HARK SARPY was badly hurt by the shot of the lurking Apache; but it was not easy to ascertain the extent of his injury.

As the bullet had entered his side, there could be no doubt that the wound was very serious.

His friends did what they could toward stopping the flow of blood, and hastily prepared a litter of poles, on which they carried him through the secret pass and up the cut in the cliff to his home at Bella Vista.

There he was met by his eldest daughter, who fell into such a passion of tears at the sight of his pale face and his bloody garments, that Mark Stepney was obliged to lead her away.

The wounded man was carried to the house, where all possible attention was given him by Mrs. Dunning and Shawnee Kate, aided by Captain Dunning.

Captain Dunning, who had been for so many years a pioneer and frontiersman, was of course familiar with gun-shot wounds and their treatment; but he shook his head sadly, as he admitted that this case was beyond him.

Mark Stepney was anxious to ride off and seek a physician; but there was nothing of the kind to be found inside of fifty miles, and it was evident to most of those present that no medical assistance could be brought there in time to be of any service to the wounded man.

"It's of no use, my boy," said Hark. "Manuel was right all along, and his nose was better than mine. That Apache followed us up from below the Gila to get even with me for the new and the old, and when he got his chance he plugged me where he meant to. No doctor could save me now, Mark, and you needn't worry about me any more. I am glad that the infernal red-skin didn't get a chance to become my son-in-law."

When Hark Sarpy was helped down from his horse, and she saw him lying there in the pass, mortally wounded by the hand of Carroh, the love which he had longed to receive from Eva came to him quickly and fully.

She was "an impulsive little savage," as he had said, and her heart went out to him then as she leaped from her horse and knelt at his side,

showering tears and endearing epithets upon him.

When she had followed him up to the plateau, their common grief brought the sisters into close communion at once, and they fell into each other's arms and wept.

This completed the civilization of Eva, so far as her family was concerned.

Thenceforward she was her father's daughter, and her sister's sister, and Bella Vista was her home, and she was glad to be there.

It was evident to Hark Sarpy's friends that his days were numbered, if not his hours.

That was his opinion, and he expressed it freely; but he suffered no pain, and he seemed to await the end with resignation if not with thankfulness.

The girls were both anxious to be with him and to help attend upon him; but their tears and agitation were such that his nurses would permit them to be near him but a little while.

Mark Stepney had something on his mind which he communicated to the wounded man as soon as he was allowed to do so.

"You remember, Mr. Sarpy," said he, "that there was a white man among the Apaches who first attacked us here. You knew him, and gave his name as Zeke Stebbins. He must have come back when the second attack was made, as we found him hiding on the plateau after Captain Lang had gone away, and made a prisoner of him. I didn't know what to do with him, and the soldiers wanted to hang him. Perhaps that would have been the right thing to do; but it seemed to me to be too cruel, and—I am afraid I did wrong, Mr. Sarpy—but I talked the matter over with Hettie, and we agreed to just turn the scamp loose and let him slide."

"That was right," said Hark. "If I had been here, I suppose I would have joined in with the soldiers and strung him up; but I feel differently now, and am glad you let him go. Is that all you wanted to tell me? I thought that perhaps you had something to say about Hettie."

"I wanted to say something," answered Mark, "but I was afraid of troubling you. I love your daughter, Mr. Sarpy, and—"

"That will do, Mark. I had supposed that you would want to say that. I am glad to hear it, and I have no doubt that she loves you. Let me alone now, and keep the girls away from me. I am sure that I am going to last through the night, and in the morning I will have something to say to you."

The wounded man did last through the night; but in the morning he found himself sinking rapidly, and it was evident that he had but a little longer to live.

At his request he was carried on his couch out under the trees in front of the house, so that he might see before he died as much as possible of his beloved Bella Vista.

Hettie and Eva were sobbing at his side, and of course Mark Stepney and Jack Bunn were there with him.

Hark Sarpy caused himself to be propped up, that he might speak to them.

"Don't cry, girls," he said. "You mustn't worry about me. It is better as it is. I have always expected to die in this way, and the wonder is that I have lived so long. I am satisfied now, and am quite willing to go, as I have at last found my lost child and brought her home. Mark, I am glad that I found you and Jack. You came just in time to be a blessing to me. I leave my girls to your care, trusting in your truth and honor. There will be enough for all of you, as I have a mine in the hills here which has scarcely been dipped into. Shawnee Jim will tell you all about it. Be good to Jim and Kate. There—I—God bless you!"

These were the last words that were uttered by Hark Sarpy.

He sunk into a state of unconsciousness, and in that condition died within an hour.

He died, as he wished to, in the open air, where there was ample room for his big soul to escape.

At his side were his two daughters, and near him were all his friends, and Eva, the recovered one, whom he had sought so long and faithfully, undergoing so many hardships and passing through so many perils, knelt by his couch and held his hand until it was lifeless.

The half-wild creature, lately the pride of the Apaches, mourned sincerely for the father whom she had lost almost as soon as she had found him; but her sorrow was not to be compared to that of her sister.

To Hester Sarpy her father had so long been all in all, and she had so admired him for his manly qualities and loved him as her one friend and protector, that his death gave her a shock from which she did not soon recover, and she wept as one who could not be comforted.

Her friends applied themselves to the task of solacing her sorrow, but did not easily succeed.

To divert her mind from its present grief they made her acquainted with that part of Hark Sarpy's life which had been passed apart from her, and which he had carefully concealed from her lest she should be too anxious concerning him during his absence, and lest the

deeds which had gained him the name of "Hark, the Hater," should change her love to fear.

She had lately had some insight into this phase of his character, and when the truth of his long search and his exciting career was disclosed to her, she was not greatly surprised, nor did it diminish her love and respect for the father who had been so faithful to his own.

It was a little strange, perhaps, but not as wholly unreasonable as it appeared to some of those about her, that the first effect of the story that was told to her was to cause her to dislike her new-found sister.

Eva as it seemed to her at the moment, was more or less directly the cause of her father's death.

If she had not obstinately gone back to the Apaches after she had been rescued from them, he need not have gone in search of her again, and would not have been slain by her Indian lover.

In justice to Hester, however, it must be said that this mood lasted but a little while.

After the first severe outburst of grief she was quick to perceive the injustice of her thought, and to recognize the fact that Eva was entirely innocent of any intentional harm.

The reaction naturally came in the form of an almost extravagant affection for the sister whom she had wronged in her mind, and this, more than anything else, helped to close the floodgates of her sorrow.

To bring Eva fully back to civilization and make her one of themselves, it was thought proper that she should discard her Apache apparel and assume an attire that was better suited to her present position.

As no mourning goods were available at Bella Vista, Hester prepared for her sister, with the help of Mrs. Dunning, some of her own garments, and Eva was easily induced to wear them.

Her transformation from a wild girl into a young lady not only improved her appearance vastly, but assisted the civilizing process which had been so well begun.

It was admitted by her friends, however, that Jack Bunn could be better trusted than anybody else with her education in the ways of civilization.

"She loves him," said Hettie, "and she will learn more from him in a day than we could teach her in a week."

Hark Sarpy was buried on the plateau of his beloved Bella Vista, and Mark Stepney, who remembered somewhat of the Episcopalian ritual, added a solemnity to the occasion by repeating portions of the service for the dead.

Under the circumstances—it being settled that Mark Stepney and Jack Bunn should remain at Bella Vista until it should be deemed proper and feasible to bring to pass certain events in which they were jointly interested with the two sisters—it was thought best that Mrs. Dunning and her husband should protract their stay at the house on the plateau as long as their own affairs would allow them to do so.

Bob Dunning returned to the ranch in the valley with Joe Buller and Ben Boggs, discovered that it had not been materially injured by the Apache raid, and set at work to straighten up things and continue the plan which had been laid out for the season's employment.

Captain Dunning visited them occasionally to note their progress and give directions; but the greater part of his time was passed at Bella Vista.

CHAPTER XL.

TROUBLE AT THE DEAD MAN'S MINE.

AFTER the death of Hark Sarpy the thread of life was taken up at Bella Vista by its old and new inmates, the intention being to carry out the wishes of its late master as far as they had been expressed or could be inferred.

The first thing necessary was to take care of the young crops on the plateau, which had been neglected and to some extent trampled and otherwise interfered with during the recent incursions.

In this the advice and assistance of Captain Dunning were very valuable, and the two young men, though quite unused to agricultural labor, made up by zeal for what they lacked in knowledge.

Eva Sarpy took such a lively interest in this place of civilized existence, that it was with difficulty she could be persuaded from taking a hoe and working with the rest.

Among the Apaches, she said, the squaws did such work as that, and it was necessary to remind her that she was not a squaw.

Though she was not allowed to labor in the field, she was not prevented from accompanying the others, and she naturally attached herself to that portion of the work in which Jack Bunn was engaged.

There was one other of Hark Sarpy's enterprises which required the attention of his present representatives, and that was the mine of which he had spoken to Mark Stepney.

Hester knew of the mine, though she had never seen it, and had in her possession some specimens of the ore which her father had given her.

She showed them to Mark, who had gained by

experience some knowledge of mining matters, and he knew enough to easily decide that they had been taken from a rich vein.

The old man had said that Shawnee Jim could tell his young friends about the mine, and both he and Manuel were ready to give all the information in their power.

The mine was not far from the plateau and the house; but the difficulty with its practical and profitable working was found in the fact that the location was so inaccessible to make it almost impossible to get in machinery for reducing the ore, and difficult to carry the rock away for that purpose.

"That don't matter," suggested Mark Stepney. "If the ore averages anything like as well as the specimens we have here, there can be some way found to get the metal out."

No such way had yet been discovered, though Hark Sarpy had an idea that if he could get his machinery in he might work it by means of a flume stream from the pond in the mountain that supplied the plateau with water.

As yet the discoverer and proprietor of the mine had done nothing except, with the help of his few men at Bella Vista, to tap the vein and take out a little ore, which had been broken up for the purpose of transportation or other use.

It is to be supposed that his frequent and lengthy absences, occasioned by the search for his child, had prevented him from forming any settled plan or doing any regular work at the mine.

Before the necessary agricultural operations at Bella Vista were quite completed, Manuel made a hasty visit to the mine, to inquire into its condition and that of the tools which had been left there, work having been intermitted since the close of the preceding fall.

He came home with a gloomy countenance and a puzzled look that provoked inquiry.

He seemed to be loth to speak, and the cause of his hesitation was found in the fact that he considered his tale so improbable that he could not expect it to be believed.

Yet, when the pressure of curiosity compelled him to tell it, it proved to be a very simple matter—at least, in one aspect.

His report was that a portion of the ore which they had taken out and broken up had been carried away.

This was not at all wonderful, inasmuch as valuable ore that was left unguarded was always liable to be stolen, provided it should be discovered by rascals, and there was always plenty of rascals.

At the same time it was quite surprising, because the mine, if it should happen to be discovered, was so difficult of access, and because it could hardly be a profitable business to thieves to transport the ore a long distance.

Therefore Manuel's story was received, as he had expected it to be, with expressions of incredulity, especially on the part of Shawnee Jim.

He stuck to it, all the same, positively declaring that there could be no doubt of the disappearance of a portion of the ore, and that the indications plainly showed that the removal had been recently made.

On these points he insisted so strongly that Mark Stepney resolved to visit the mine as soon as possible and investigate the mystery.

The next morning he set out for that purpose, accompanied by Manuel and Captain Dunning, leaving Jack Bunn and Shawnee Jim in charge of Bella Vista.

They went on foot, as they had but a short distance to travel, and were well armed, as it was possible that they might encounter some of the thieves, though it was reasonable to suppose that the depredations were committed under cover of the night.

Mark Stepney was surprised at the character of the route that led to the hidden mine.

It was a continuation of the narrow pass or crevice which led from the main pass through the mountain range, and from which Hark Sarpy had diverged with his young friends by the cut in the rock which took them to the top of the plateau.

This crevice continued in a northerly direction, cutting off the plateau from the rest of the range.

At a point which corresponded with the upper end of the plateau, Manuel stopped and pointed out the place where the Apaches had ascended to make their first attack on Bella Vista.

Stepney examined the location, and suggested that with a few charges of blasting powder he could make the plateau impregnable at that point.

The narrow pass shortly made a bend to the right, leading to the basin in which the mine was situated.

This basin was an irregular oval in shape, and in extent comprised about two acres of somewhat rocky ground.

Its sides were mountainous, lofty and generally inaccessible, the eastern end being a sheer cliff with a slight overhang.

The western end was the side of a steep mountain peak, the same which closed in the upper end of the Bella Vista plateau, and Stepney, judging pretty accurately the location of the

lake up yonder, perceived that it would be quite an easy engineering feat to bring from there a water power of great force.

It was near the eastern end that the mine was situated, and as yet there was nothing to show for it but a small hole in the rock and a pile of broken ore.

Obviously there was no way of getting into or out of the basin but that by which Stepney and his party had come.

As they came they had carefully examined the bottom of the narrow pass for signs of the thieves as it was believed that if any ore had been stolen it must have been taken out in that direction but no signs were visible, though in places the gravel or sand might have given evidence.

When they came to the examination of the neighborhood of the mine, it was evident that thieves had been about, as recent tracks were found there which were clearly not those of Manuel.

The Mexican's report was also confirmed by the appearance of the pile of ore, from which a considerable portion was missing and had evidently been lately removed.

Of this there could be no manner of doubt, as the pile had lain through the winter, and was sufficiently weather-worn to show where it had been interfered with.

How had the basin been discovered, and who could the thieves be?

The most reasonable answer to the first question suggested a highly probable answer to the second.

Hark Sarpy said that the only white man besides himself and his own people who knew how to gain access to the plateau at the northern end was Zeke Stebbins.

Consequently the squaw man was doubtless as well acquainted with the upper portion of the pass as anybody else, and it was reasonable to suppose that in the course of his spying about there he had strayed into the basin and discovered Hark Sarpy's mine.

Knowing of the calamities that had fallen upon Bella Vista, he had taken advantage of them to steal the valuable ore in sight and ready for removals.

If so, who had helped him, and how had he got away with it?

Stepney suggested that he might have been assisted by his friends the Apaches; but this idea was promptly repudiated by Captain Dunning and Manuel.

"The fact of the matter is," said the old man, "that the 'Paches don't go into that line of business. Silver ore is no 'count to an Injin, and he won't work, anyhow."

Further consideration led the parties to the conclusion that Zeke Stebbins, if he should prove to be the thief, must have done the work alone or with little help.

As there was obviously but one way by which he could get out with it, it was determined to guard the pass, lie in wait for him at night, and catch him in the act.

When they had got home and reported their discoveries and conclusions, it was settled that Shawnee Jim and Manuel, who volunteered for the purpose, should keep guard in the pass that night, taking turns.

They were to conceal themselves and watch for the appearance of the thief or thieves, but on no account to expose themselves to danger.

If the depredators should prove to be too many for them, they were to let them pass and notice their proceedings.

Nothing was heard from them during the night, and in the morning they showed up at Bella Vista with the report that nothing had happened to them.

They had simply passed a quiet night, and were sure that nobody had entered or left the pass.

"If that proves anything," observed Mark Stepney, "it proves that the thief has come to the conclusion that the game is not worth the candle, as the expense of stealing the ore is greater than the profit to be got out of it. So he has quit the business, and we won't be bothered by him any more."

This was the opinion of the others, with the exception of Manuel, and they confessed to a feeling of relief on that score.

Yet, when Stepney and Captain Dunning made another trip to the mine, they discovered, greatly to their astonishment and vexation, that the depredations had been continued.

There could be no doubt of this, as they had noticed the pile of valuable ore carefully, and were then confident that a considerable portion of it had disappeared since their last visit.

This was clear enough, and the puzzle was, since it was certain that the pass had not been used for that purpose, how had the thieves got away with the plunder.

"I can't imagine how the scheme is worked," said Mark, "unless they have a balloon."

As he spoke he glanced upward at the lofty walls that surrounded the basin, and suddenly uttered a smothered ejaculation.

"What's up?" hastily demanded Captain Dunning.

"Hush, and don't look up! I saw a man looking over the edge of the cliff up there. I don't want him to think that we have noticed

him. Come to the mine hole, and we will busy ourselves about there for a few minutes."

They did as Mark suggested, and after a few minutes sauntered away and turned into the pass by which they had reached the basin.

There they halted and concealed themselves, and one after the other peered around a point of rock and glanced up at the cliff at the eastern end of the basin.

The same man whom Stepney had seen was again looking down over the edge of the cliff.

CHAPTER XLI.

ON A CROOKED TRAIL.

"THAT kinder gits me!" remarked Captain Dunning. "What do you make of it, my boy?"

"It seems to me to be pretty plain now," answered Stepney. "The man we saw looking over the edge of the cliff is one of the rascals who have been stealing the ore."

"Like enough; but that don't tell us anythin' to speak of. What was he doin' up thar, and how do they git away with the stuff?"

"I said that they might work the scheme by means of a balloon. Well, they haven't got a balloon, but have got the next thing to it, I judge."

"What's that?"

"Some sort of a hoisting-machine by which they raise the ore up to the edge of the cliff. I don't know how they could have hit upon an easier or safer way of working the scheme. We would never have suspected it if we had not happened to catch sight of that fellow."

"But what do they want to git the stuff up thar fur; and what do they do with it arter they git it thar?"

"That's what we will have to find out."

Mark Stepney expressed the opinion of the other inmates of Bella Vista in saying that the how and the wherefore of the ore-stealing mystery was something they would have to find out.

When he and Captain Dunning reached the plateau and made their report, it was the unanimous opinion there that the matter must be immediately investigated.

It would never do to allow such a rascally scheme to be worked, without a vigorous and successful effort to get at the bottom of it, to wipe out every vestige of its methods, and to punish the perpetrators if they could be got hold of.

Captain Dunning sensibly suggested that they ought not to run any risks that could be avoided, and therefore should take a sufficient force to enable them to overcome the rascals in the event of a collision.

He proposed to bring from his ranch his son Bob, with Ben Boggs and Joe Butler, as they could easily be spared for a day or two, if not longer, and the addition of those three would give a large enough party to go in search of the thieves, without leaving Bella Vista unguarded.

The young men, who were glad to have a little more excitement to vary the monotony of ranching, came willingly enough, and the morning after Mark Stepney's discovery at the mine-basin, the party were ready to start.

It consisted of six men, Jack Bunn and Bob Dunning being left at the house to take care of the ladies.

As they were all well armed, it was supposed that this force would be quite sufficient for the accomplishment of their purpose.

Captain Dunning, in view of his age and experience, was made the leader of the expedition, and Shawnee Jim, who was better acquainted with the intricacies of the mountains than any of the others, acted as guide.

After bidding their friends at Bella Vista not to worry about them in case they should not return for a day or so, they descended into the pass, and went out into the gorge that led through the range.

They followed this pass eastward, and moved rather slowly, as it was important that they should find and use the first practicable opening into the hills at the northern side of the gorge.

Nothing of the kind was found, in spite of the most diligent search, until they had reached and passed the place where Hark Sarpy and his two young friends were overtaken by the Apaches whom they astonished with dynamite.

There Shawnee Jim, who was in the advance, struck a horse-trail that led out of the gorge in a northerly direction.

It had apparently been used very little of late, but was still an evident trail, and they had no hesitation in following it, as their object was to reach by the nearest possible route the edge of the cliff where Stepney had seen the man looking down into the basin.

As they started into the hills that young man was seized by an idea, and he hastened to relieve himself of the burden.

"When I first saw that Zeke Stebbins," said he, "at the tavern across the range which Mr. Sarpy spoke about, I remember his telling the Irishman who kept the place that he had quit trading with the Indians, and had gone into mining speculations. Perhaps he was not lying then, or part of the statement may have been true."

"S'pose he was tellin' the truth fur once," remarked Captain Dunning. "What of it?"

"Just this of it. He may have a mine somewhere about here in the hills, or may have had one, or may have been interested in one, and there may be some machinery at that mine."

"Durned if I kin guess what you're drivin' at, my boy."

"If there is anything of the kind, he may be taking the stolen ore there. If not, I can't imagine what he can do with it. This trail was made for some purpose, and it is quite likely that it may lead to a mine."

"There is somethin' in that, Mark. Anyhow, the trail is bound to lead to somewhar."

Shawnee Jim, who had been examining the sign carefully, gave it as his opinion that the trail was not and never had been an Indian trail.

If it had been made by white men, there was more than a chance that Stepney's supposition was correct.

It was soon made evident that the trail was not going to lead them to the edge of the cliff which they desired to reach, unless by a round-about way, as it had a steady northeasterly direction, and a southeasterly course was what they wanted.

However, as it was the only opening into the hills which they had been able to find, there was nothing for them to do but to follow it, hoping that they might strike a side trail which would take them to their objective point.

If Stepney's supposition should prove correct, and the trail should lead them to a mine, abandoned or otherwise, they might expect to gain information that would lead to more important results.

That was exactly what they found at the end of it.

The trail led them on into the hills, with only a slight ascent, and without any visible opening at either side, until it terminated in a glen that well fitted Stepney's guess.

Then they found a rude shanty, a rusty engine and boiler under a shed, with an opening in the rock, and piles of broken stone, all of which clearly indicated an abandoned or unused mine.

The party from Bella Vista hurried forward, hoping to take the occupants of the little settlement by surprise; but they found no occupants there.

Although there were signs of recent habitation in and about the shanty, it then contained no inhabitants, and the closest search failed to discover any.

It was impossible to decide how many people had lately been there; but the number could not be less than four or five, judging by the horse-tracks.

The engine and boiler had evidently not been used for many months, and that the mine had been abandoned as worthless was made clear by the quality of the outfit that lay about the opening.

Near the engine shed, however, was found a pile of ore that was much fresher in appearance, and far more valuable than the stuff about the mine.

As soon as this was discovered it was pounced upon and examined as a clew to the lost property.

"This is our ore," said Stepney, as he picked up a chunk and viewed it critically.

"I reckon it must be," observed Captain Dunning. "It never growed here, fur sartin', and it's been brought here quite lately, too."

"More than that, my friend. I am a fair judge of that sort of thing, and I would be willing to swear that it came from Hark Sarpy's mine. I wish I could as easily tell you what has become of the rascals who brought it away."

"Findin' 'em is now only a question of time, Mark. We've struck one end o' the trail, and only need to foller it up to git to t'other end. I reckon it's the best end we've struck, too, as we'll be more likely to close in on 'em and take 'em when they won't be lookin' fur us."

"You think, then, that we'll find them at our mine?"

"Thar or tharabouts, and all we've got to do is to ketch onto the trail."

Shawnee Jim attended to this matter, and had no difficulty in finding what he wanted.

The trail was a horse trail, evidently a new one, leading up a steep ascent in a westwardly direction, and there could scarcely be a doubt that the recent occupants of the glen had taken that trail.

Captain Dunning's party started off on the trail as soon as it was found, but they did not make rapid progress, as they had come from Bella Vista afoot, presuming that they would have to explore regions where horses could not travel.

They did not grumble at this, but found some consolation in it.

"It may tire us a bit," remarked the old man, "but we kin git over sech ground as this as fast as if we was mounted, and we'll be more likely to come up on our game, as they will have to quit their horses or stand and take what we've got fur 'em."

In this prediction the speaker was mistaken, as the result proved.

The trail led the party by a rough and diffi-

cult route, over ridges and through ravines, until they came out on a rocky level which, they were quite sure, must terminate at the cliff which they desired to reach.

Indeed, they believed that they had but a little distance to travel to reach that point, when the main trail took a turn to the left, and evidently descended the mountain.

At the same time they perceived that a smaller trail led straight on toward the cliff.

"Durned if I ain't stumped this time!" exclaimed the leader. "I'm keen to bet now that this trail leads down to the Bella Vista pass, and so there must be a way out that we never discovered, sharpshotted as we thought ourselves."

This was the opinion of the others, and the question was, what should be done about it?

Shawnee Jim and Captain Dunning, after examining the ground carefully, were confident that the main party which they had followed from the glen had taken the larger and newer trail which descended the mountain.

"Seems to me," observed the old man, "that they must ha' got wind of our goin's on, and so they took the hint and cleared out."

"Why should they have chosen this route, then," demanded Mark, "when it would have been easier for them to take that which brought us into the glen yonder?"

"Mebbe because they thort that we mought come in on 'em that way."

"I don't see what there can have been that was likely to give them any suspicions. But we need not argue the point. We want to follow them, wherever they've gone; but it seems to me that before we try the downward trail, we may as well go on to the edge of our basin and see how the scheme was worked there."

"All right, Mark, as we can't be fur from that pint; but you must remember that it's gittin' late, and we hain't got much time to spare."

The party hastened forward, wishing to make the most of the remainder of daylight; but they had not taken many steps when their progress was arrested by a warning sign from Shawnee Jim, who was in the lead.

He had suddenly dropped down behind a rock, and directly he came crawling back to them with the information that there was a man just ahead of them, who seemed to be seated at the edge of the cliff.

This was good news, as they might expect to get some important information from the man if he could be quietly secured.

The task of securing him was delegated to Shawnee Jim as the most catfooted one of the party.

He was directed to creep up on the solitary watcher and seize him before he "could squeal," while the others were to follow cautiously with the view of supporting the attack if necessary.

The attempt was successful, though not quite as successful as might have been desired.

Shawnee Jim crept forward noiselessly, and the first his comrades knew of his action was when he threw himself upon the watcher and seized him from behind.

The man was easily mastered; but, before the others could come up and choke him down, he had uttered a shrill cry which must have been meant for a signal.

He was a rough scallawag of a fellow, evidently frightened by his seizure, and the situation at the edge of the cliff, including the scheme for stealing the ore, was made plain by a glance.

A heavy pulley was made fast to the trunk of an overhanging tree, and a coil of rope lay near by.

Having satisfied themselves on this point, the attention of the party was turned to the prisoner, who had been dragged backward and bound.

"Where are your partners?" demanded Mark.

The man made a show of ignorance and stupidity, pretending that he did not know what was meant by his partners, but he was speedily forced into a realizing sense of his position.

"You have been caught in a thieving game," said Stepney, "and we have the right to string you up. Tell us who your partners are, and what has become of them, and we will turn you loose. If not, we will hang you with your own rope as quick as a wink."

The prisoner was apparently glad to purchase his life upon such easy terms, and declared his willingness to tell all he knew.

Zeke Stebbins, he said, was the head of the gang that had been stealing the ore, and the visit of Mark Stepney and Captain Dunning to the basin had convinced them that they had been deceived and would be hunted down.

Therefore they had decided to turn the tables on their foes by watching their departure and striking them in their own home, and for that purpose they had taken the downward trail.

"How long ago?" demanded Mark.

"Bout two hours, I reckon."

"How many of them?"

"Five with Zeke."

The sound of distant shots startled the party. "They are at Bella Vista now!" exclaimed Mark. "Come on, my friends! We have no time to lose."

"Not that way," protested Captain Dunning, as the young man started toward the other trail.

"This'll be the quickest."

CHAPTER XLII.

HER FATHER'S OWN CHILD.

THERE was uneasiness at Bella Vista after the departure of the search expedition, and the person mainly afflicted was Hester Sarpy.

She had seen the party go away and had made no objection, unless her mournful looks might be construed into a protest; but they had no sooner got out of sight than she began to worry herself and her friends by imagining all sorts of harm that might happen to them.

Her friends sympathized with her, but none of them felt or professed to feel any such uneasiness as afflicted her.

It was in vain that Hester argued that they did not know whether they were going or whom the search might disclose; that they might be ambushed and slain, or met and overcome by a superior force—her friends could not be persuaded that the absent men were incurring any special danger.

"Here is where the danger is, if there is any danger anywhere," observed Jack Bunn; "and that reminds me that we are very neglectful in leaving the passes unguarded. Mr. Sarpy, if he could be with us, would object to that most seriously. Somebody might sneak in here as the Apaches did, and give us lots of bother."

With the praiseworthy object of atoning for this fault as far as possible, Jack sallied forth after dinner to guard the cut that led down to the pass, and Eva went with him.

It is quite likely, and such was Bob Dunning's openly expressed opinion, that he made this move for the sake of being alone with his lady love; but there surely seemed to be a warlike purpose in it, as he was fully armed, and Eva carried a Winchester rifle.

Yet there was nothing like military discipline maintained in their double sentryship.

They sauntered down to the head of the cut, seated themselves there in the shade, and apparently paid no attention to what was going on anywhere outside of their two selves.

In pursuance of the praiseworthy purpose of civilizing the ex-Apache girl, Jack was busily employed in teaching her a new language which she was more than willing to learn, and that was the language of love.

Thus the few hours that remained of the day passed rapidly and quietly, and the sun was preparing to set behind the hills to the westward of the plateau before the teacher and his pupil perceived that it was getting late.

Then the teacher suggested to the pupil that she had better go up to the house.

"I will go when you go," answered Eva.

"No, you must go without me. I was not joking when I said that this place ought to be guarded, and I think I had better stay here."

"I will stay with you, then. Hush! what's that?"

She drew him back behind the rock, and there they listened to the sound of voices approaching them from the upper end of the plateau.

"Is it possible that our people have come back already?" whispered Jack. "Of course it isn't. They would have come up this way. Who can it be?"

"Wait a little, and we will see."

Cautiously they peered out from their concealment, and plainly saw five men creeping along, under cover of the trees and near the edge of the plateau, toward the house.

"They are not our friends," whispered Jack.

"No, they are bad men, and at the head of them is that squaw man—him you call Zeke Stebbins."

"They are our enemies then. They have given our friends the slip, and have come to capture the house, supposing it to be undefended. Stand aside, Eva, and let me shoot that scoundrel down."

"Not yet, Jack, unless they should stop here and find us. Let them pass on if they will, and then our chance comes to hurt them."

Jack Bunn knew that it would be idle to argue the point or attempt to dissuade her from her purpose.

Besides, the purpose was a good one, the best plan that could be devised.

So they waited and watched, with cocked rifles and anxious eyes.

The five men passed their position, and moved steadily and silently toward the house.

"Now, Jack!" whispered Eva, and her touch on his arm was like an inspiration to him.

Lightly she stepped forth from the place of concealment, posted herself behind an adjoining tree, and opened fire upon the men who were swiftly walking away toward the house.

Jack selected another tree, and followed her example with most commendable alacrity.

The first shots told, and the sneaking depredators found themselves in a most unpleasant predicament.

Unexpectedly assailed from the rear, they were at first so astonished that they did not know what to do with themselves.

As well as Jack and Eva could judge in the growing darkness, at least one of them hastened on toward the house, and two others dodged behind trees to fight the foes who had sprung up in the rear.

They fought well, too, as soon as they discov-

ered that they were not outnumbered or outflanked, and the bullets rattled in a lively manner about the trees which sheltered Jack and Eva.

After a few minutes of this furious fusillade a lucky bullet from Jack's rifle disabled one of the intruders, and the other ran off, probably in the direction of the house.

As soon as the noise of the firing ceased in that quarter the two remaining fighters heard shots in the direction of the house, and then the welcome sound of the voice of Bob Dunning, who was calling Eva as loud as he could yell.

She answered with a shrill and peculiar cry which was doubtless understood by him for whom it was intended.

"We are all right now," said Jack. "We have got them where we want them, and can soon clean out the scamps. Stay here a bit, Eva, or step back to the head of the pass, while I run and help Bob to hunt them down."

He ran toward the house without waiting for an answer, and Eva started to follow him; but she stopped, hesitated, and finally returned to the place of concealment at the head of the cut.

As there were then no more sounds of shooting or of strife of any kind, it seemed that there were no more rascals left to hunt down.

Those who had not been killed or disabled must have taken to flight and made their escape.

Eva began to get impatient when she had been left alone there a few minutes, and to long for the return of Jack, who would of course come and report to her as soon as possible.

She heard hasty steps approaching the cut, and walked forth to greet her lover, but was surprised, if not astonished.

It was not Jack who came running to her, but Zeke Stebbins, the squaw-man!

Stebbins was as much surprised as she was.

Doubtless supposing that the pass was no longer guarded, he had sought that way of escape, only to find the girl in his path.

As it happened, the charges in her rifle had been all shot away, and she had no more cartridges.

She was well aware of her defenseless condition, but was not on that account a bit less resolute and fearless, standing there at the head of the cut and barring the way with her slight form.

With Zeke Stebbins it was neck or nothing.

He must burst that frail barrier or be captured by the men who were seeking him.

"Git out, girl!" he shouted. "Clear the track, if you don't want to be hurt!"

"You squaw man!" answered Eva, with an intensity of contemptuous emphasis.

"Git out, I say!" ordered Stebbins, as he drew a revolver and advanced upon her.

As quick as thought she swung her rifle and struck up the revolver, which was discharged harmlessly.

The swinging rifle did yet more effective work.

It struck the squaw man on the side of his head, knocking him senseless to the ground.

The next moment Jack Bunn, who had heard the report, came running to the spot, reaching it just in time to hear voices and steps coming up the cut.

"Who's there?" he shouted as he leveled his rifle down the pass.

An answering voice assured him that friends were at hand, and Mark Stepney and his comrades came hurrying up the cut.

A few words from Jack put them in possession of the main facts, and Eva was highly complimented as the heroine of the occasion.

"Are all safe at the house?" demanded Mark.

"All safe and sound, and all the rascals have been killed or have got away, except this one, and I don't know whether we will have him to hang or not."

Mark Stepney hastened to the house to join Hettie, and the other picked up Zeke Stebbins and followed slowly behind.

It was for some time doubtful whether the squaw man would live or die; but Eva's sturdy stroke had fractured his skull, and he lingered in unconsciousness until near morning, when he was pronounced dead.

Meantime the plateau had been thoroughly searched with out discovering any of the late assailants alive, with the exception of one man who had been disabled by Jack Bunn's last shot.

That fellow was taken to the house and cared for until he was entirely recovered, when he was permitted to remain at his own request, and he proved his gratitude by faithful service.

Bob Dunning returned to the ranch with Joe Buller and Ben Boggs; but Captain Dunning and his wife did not follow them until a clergyman had been secured and there had been a double wedding at Bella Vista.

The house and the platform were ample for the accommodation of two families, and it was long before Mark Stepney got Hark Sarpy's mine in working order, and a single stamp mill with water power from the mountain made it a paying property.

If marriage did not complete the civilization of Eva, her first child settled the business, and from that day to this the occupants of Bella Vista have been troubled no more by Apache or other raids.

THE END.

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